

# **CRISIS-SCAPES ATHENS AND BEYOND**

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# CONTENTS

## FOREWORD

1. Introduction  
Crisis-scape ..... p.7

## I. FLOWS, INFRASTRUCTURES, NETWORKS

2. Political and Cultural Implications  
of the Suburban Transformation of  
Athens  
Leonidas Economou ..... p.13

3. Messogia, the New 'Eleftherios  
Venizelos Airport' and 'Attiki Odos'  
or, the Double Marginalization of  
Messogia  
Dimitra Gefou-Madianou ..... p.18

4. Infrastructural Flows, Interruptions  
and Stasis in Athens of the Crisis  
Dimitris Dalakoglou and Yannis  
Kallianos ..... p.23

5. Athens as a Failed City for  
Consumption  
(In a World that Evaluates Everyone and  
Every Place by their Commodity Value)  
Andreas Chatzidakis ..... p.33

## **II. MAPPING SPACES OF RACIST VIOLENCE**

6. "Very Unhappy to Say That to Some Point It's True":  
Fascist Intrusion Within Greek Police  
Dimitris Christopoulos ..... p.47

7. Strange Encounters  
Crisis-scape ..... p.51

8. Migration Knots: Crisis Within a Crisis  
Sarah Green ..... p.55

## **III. BETWEEN INVISIBILITY AND PRECARIITY**

9. Laissez Faire, Security, and Liberalism: Revisiting December 2008  
Akis Gavrilidis ..... p.67

10. Governing For the Market: Emergencies and Emergences in Power and Subjectivity  
Athena Athanasiou ..... p.72

11. From Invisibility into the Centre of the Athenian Media Spectacle  
Giorgos Tsimouris ..... p.78

12. Is the crisis in Athens (also) Gendered? Facets of Access and (in) Visibility in Everyday Public Spaces  
Dina Vaiou ..... p.82

13. Metronome  
Antonis Vradis ..... p.90

## **IV. RIGHT TO THE CITY IN CRISIS**

14. The Crisis and its Discourses: Quasi-Orientalist Offensives Against Southern Urban Spontaneity, Informality and *Joie De Vivre*  
Lila Leontidou ..... p.107

15. Crisis, Right to the City Movements and the Question of Spontaneity: Athens and Mexico City  
Christy Petropoulou ..... p.115

16. Unravelling False Choice Urbanism  
Tom Slater ..... p.128

17. Contesting Speculative Urbanisation and Strategising Discontents  
Hyun Bang Shin ..... p.139

18. Against Accountancy Governance: Notes Towards a New Urban Collective Consumption  
Andy Merrifield ..... p.150

## **V. DEVALUING LABOUR, DEPRECIATING LAND**

19. Crisis and Land Dispossession  
Costis Hadjimichalis ..... p.171

20. What is to be Done? Redefining, Re-Asserting and Reclaiming Land, Labour and the City  
Bob Caterall ..... p.179

21. Labour Migration, Brokerage, and Governance in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries  
Filippo Osella ..... p.190

22. Alienation and Urban Life  
David Harvey ..... p.195

## **AFTERWORD**

23. Emerging Common Spaces as a Challenge to the City of Crisis  
Stavros Stavrides ..... p.209



# FOREWORD

by Crisis-scape

**F**our years and four days. The exact amount of time, that is, that has lapsed since the day the greek state would sign its ‘memorandum of agreement’ with its lenders (the IMF, the EU and the ECB), on May 5, 2010—officially making its own way into the era of global austerity and crisis. An entering that would come with a bang, and very much stay so: from that moment on, the social tension playing out at the greek territory would feature—constantly, it seems—in discussions, analyses and reports the world over.

But what is life like in a city that finds itself in the eye of the crisis-storm, how does the everyday reality here compare to Athens’ global media portrait? What kind of lessons might our city be able to learn from the outbreaks of capitalism’s crises elsewhere, and what lessons might the Athenian example be able to offer, in return? The volume that you hold in your hands acts as an accompaniment to a conference that tried to answer some of these questions. ‘Crisis-scapes: Athens and beyond’ took place in the city of Athens on May 9&10, 2014. Over the two days, the conference tried to explore an array of the facets of the crisis in the city, divided between five axes/panels, which are in turn mirrored in the structure of this book: 1. *Flows, infrastructures and networks*, 2. *Mapping spaces of racist violence*, 3. *Between invisibility and precarity*, 4. *The right to the city in crisis* and 5. *Devaluing labour, depreciating land*.

Five broad axes comprising the vehicles we used to perambulate through the dark landscapes of the crisis. A crisis neither commencing nor ending here, today. Through these conceptual vehicles taking us through Athens, through her spaces and her times, we focused on the particularities of the greek crisis; a crisis first of all concerning the structures, meanings and processes weaving together what we could broadly label as the greek everyday reality. Yet we also believe these particularities ought to be understood within the global financial crisis framework: hence this centrifugal “beyond”. Athens may now be in a position to offer explanations about phenomena taking place much beyond the city’s strict geographical limits. What renders the city a field of experimentation are trials and productions of new means of governance. And they acquire a new meaning when seen as wider tendencies in crisis management.

Yet these Athenian testing grounds must at the same time be studied as traces and as future projections of structural readjustments taking place in seemingly disparate locations, but often-times ever so close in their causes and consequences alike. The interventions put together in the present volume try to take another composite look at Athens and its crisis. They try to comprehend the city through crossings and transitions in space and in time.





# **I. FLOWS INFRASTRUCTURES NETWORKS**

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# Flows, Infrastructures and Networks

## Section Opening

by Dimitris Dalakoglou

**P**eople, information, labour, vehicles, commodities, waste, water or energy are just some of the elements that move around us making up the dynamic urban condition. However, it is not only mobile subjects and objects that constitute dimensions of the urban everydayness—what are equally important are the material infrastructures of flows: the built environment, highways, streets, pipelines, tunnels, airports, ports or landfills and various other grids synthesize city's spatial formations and are crucial parts of the multiple urban experiences.

Since the end of the WWII, Athens has been growing into a city where nearly half of the country's population live; an urban complex that flows and grows out of its previous boundaries every few decades. But if the quantitative growth of the city has been impressive in these past six decades, the qualitative dimensions of that same expansion are equally formidable. It is not only that consumption increased, as Andreas Chatzidakis shows us, or that vehicles multiplied; it is not merely the emergence of the new suburbs that Leonidas Economou tells us about, or the new mega-infrastructure that were built—such as those studied by Giannis Kallianos (and Dimitris Dalakoglou) or Dimitra Gefou-Madianou. As all section authors agree, these processes facilitate the shaping of specific socio-material formations and subjects. They imply uneven experiences of the urban and materialise—quite literally—urban marginality and inequality.

During the post—2010 crisis, the local project of neoliberalism is revealed anew as a failure, for the great majority. This failure in terms of infrastructural flows is often translated as slowing down while in terms of urban materialities as break downs. The construction and even the maintenance of public works and infrastructures has been paused; the flow of commodities (and thus waste) has decreased and the number and flow of vehicles, arrivals, departures etc. are reduced. Yet as all section chapters explain, these failures and interruptions that prevail today are merely the real face of neoliberal urban growth that was being applied systemically to some proximate Others until the recent past. The ones who were on the wrong side of the grid or the flow. Nevertheless, now this model expands affecting almost everyone—leading to new social formations and paradigms of staying, building, consuming, resisting and Being in the city during the crisis.



## 2

# Political and Cultural Implications of the Suburban Transformation of Athens

by Leonidas Economou

I will use the term suburb to refer to the urban areas, which approximate the notion of the bourgeois suburb, as it is usually defined in the literature of the social sciences. The metropolitan development of recent decades has destabilized, to some extent, the notion of the suburb without erasing, however, its spatial and social specificity. A number of suburban areas, in the above sense, can be discerned in the Athenian conurbation. Their spatial form has some distinct indigenous traits (Economou, 2012) and they are perhaps more socially mixed than is often the case in other countries, but they are nevertheless spatially, socially and symbolically differentiated from other areas of the city (Maloutas, 2000, 2013).

During the first decades after the second World War (1950-1970), Athens attracted a large part of the population and the economic and cultural dynamism of the country (the population grew from 1,4 million in 1951 to 2,5 million in 1971). The larger part of the new population was directed to the central city (the municipality of Athens), where it was housed in the newly built apartment buildings (*polikatoikies*), and to the working-class districts (especially in the western part of the city), which were built through processes of self-housing and informal settlement. The great majority of the higher socio-economic strata lived in the central city and many had second homes in suburban or countryside resorts. The suburban areas, which were formed during the interwar period along the *Kifisias* and the *Paraliaki* avenues (and became later known as the Northern and the Southern suburbs) grew quickly, but their population remained quite small as a percentage of the total. Despite its great expansion during these years, Athens remained a highly centralized

city. The central city gathered most supralocal functions and activities, and dominated the whole conurbation. The suburbs depended on the central city and were very different from it. They were almost exclusively residential, with detached houses surrounded by gardens, and they had a semi-rural character, as they were separated by large open spaces from the city and contained many unbuilt and green spaces.

The Athenian growth slowed down in the next decades and the population reached 3,2 million in 1991 and 3,8 million in 2011. A number of factors (including the saturation of the center and the deterioration of the quality of life due to the model of urban growth of the previous period, the expansion of the middle class, the increase of private automobiles, and the attraction of the suburban way of life) led to important internal movements and rearrangements (Maloutas 2000, 2013). A growing movement of middle-class migration from the center to the suburbs (and especially those contained within the *Lecanopedio*: the Athenian basin) begun in the seventies. The suburbs started to grow faster than the central city and the surrounding working-class districts, which during the 1980s had started to lose population. The suburban exodus continued and intensified during the following twenty years (1991-2011), and many central areas lost a large part of their older inhabitants, who were replaced by immigrants and refugees. The new suburbanites were directed to the established suburbs in the North and the South, but they also started to populate new suburban or semi-suburban areas in the whole of Attica and beyond. The great infrastructure works constructed in relation to the Olympic games in the period between 1995-2005 (Spata airport, suburban rail, new highways) connected directly for the first time the three physical components of Attica (*Lecanopedio*, *Thriasio*, *Mesogeia*) and reinforced the suburban transformation of Athens. The emerging suburban landscape differed in many ways from the past. The model of the garden suburb with the detached houses was replaced, in most old and new suburbs, by luxurious apartment buildings and residential complexes of small two-storey houses (*mezonetes*). The suburbs were progressively absorbed in the continuous urban fabric and became “urbanized” as important activities and functions (employment, commerce, entertainment, health services, culture) became increasingly decentralized. A number of peripheral urban centers and zones emerged in the suburbs, while the central areas were largely abandoned and continued to decline.

Suburbanization was a middle-class reaction to the problems created by the growth of the city and the particular growth model and in the same time an expression of the attraction of the suburban ideal. The Athenian suburbanization of the last decades confirms the received knowledge that the suburbs are an

expression of, and reinforce, a retreat from society and social responsibility, a consumerist way of life, and an attitude of social and racial discrimination. However, as more recent scholarship has shown, suburbanization has been and continues to be a very complex and hybrid phenomenon, comprising different motivations, values and ways of life (Fishman, 1994; Silverstone, 1997). In what follows I try to discern some of the dominant recent trends and practices and I do little justice to the heterogeneity and the alternative ways of life and political movements that appeared during this period in the suburbs.

The suburbanization of the last twenty-five years is related to the appearance of powerful new media (especially private television) and a great advance of consumerism in Greek society and culture. The ethic of accumulation and restrained consumption (that prevailed until the 1980s) was replaced by a hedonistic morality of consumption, spending and enjoyment based partly on credit. A series of new features and trends—including the commodification of new aspects of social life, the growing importance of consumption and leisure activities, the pervasiveness of advertisement, the desire for luxury, distinction and individuality, and the increasing emphasis on the design and style of goods and the self—became widely disseminated and found their apotheosis in the suburbs. The sites of the new consumer lifestyles were located there. The suburban home in a suburban location was presented, by the advertisement, marketing and media industries that constructed and disseminated the new consumer *and* suburban ideal, as the necessary prerequisite for the possession and display of the goods, and the deployment of the practices and identities of modern consumerism. The “temples of consumption” and the “dream-worlds” of the metropolis were also transported, to a large degree, in the suburbs. The first modern shopping centers and shopping malls, as well as new kinds of music halls, dancing clubs and leisure complexes, were built in the suburbs, and they have subsequently marked their space, experience and identity (Rigopoulos, 2003). Some suburban city centers experienced great growth and change and a new postmodern landscape was constructed that included stylistic display, spectacular imagery and simulation, cultural and material consumption and play.

The recent Athenian suburbanization is also related to important shifts in political ideology and practice and the creation of new forms of social and spatial control and exclusion. The more recent migration to the suburbs was motivated not only by environmental and lifestyle considerations, but also by a growing fear of otherness and crime, and a desire for increased social and spatial segregation. A landscape of fear is gradually built in many suburbs. Houses and residential complexes are now visually separated from the street,

often hiding behind high walls and other fortifications, and they are equipped with electronic surveillance systems and patrolled by private police services (Papadopoulou, 2003). In some cases, new protected and fortified spaces are formed that approximate the type of the gated community. The demand for greater separation is also reflected in suburban politics. The political scene of many suburbs was dominated by conflicts arising from the urbanization of the suburbs, and in many cases homeowners' movements appeared that can be interpreted as defending the interests and the separatist strategies of the privileged. More generally, suburbanization, in conjunction with electronic media and consumerism (with which it is structurally related), can be seen as a factor contributing to the disintegration of civic democratic culture and to the transformation of political society towards some form of media controlled meta-democracy (Whyte, 1956; Habermas, 1989).

The recent economic crisis in Greece is a local expression of a European and global crisis that revealed the structural workings and the failures of the market economy, the European Union, and the local economic and political system and culture. The suburban transformation of the city is an expression and a consequence of the model of urban growth that was established after the war and remained largely intact until recently, and the accompanying ideology of unrestrained growth and crude modernism. The policies and the practices in the land and housing sector during the first post-war decades on the one hand provoked the saturation and degradation of the central city—thus triggering migration from it; and on the other hand, they prepared the suburban exodus by propelling the territorial expansion of the city and the incorporation of many peripheral suburban areas in the city plan. The demand for suburban homes after the 1980s, and the suburban planning and building provisions and codes, permitting the intensive exploitation of the land, secured the robustness of the construction industry in the following decades and the continuation of its economic and ideological role. If the urbanization of the period between 1950-1970 was the vehicle for the embourgeoisement of the underprivileged strata of Greek society, the subsequent suburbanization enabled and marked their transition to consumerism and political complacency. The eager adoption and the specific form of the recent suburban ideal seem to be the natural continuation of the radical individualism and the unquestioning modernism of the previous period. The abandonment of the center is a reaction to the problems of the city related to the atrophic civic culture and the “anarchic individualism” of the post-war period. The suburbanization of the recent decades appears, moreover, as the logical outcome of an ideology which privileges expansion, newness and the present, instead of preservation, maintenance and the future—and is largely



indifferent to the long-term environmental, social and economic viability of the city. The massive destruction of the neoclassical city after the war and its replacement by the monotonous and indifferent modernism of the apartment building stem from the same cultural matrix that led to the rapid devaluation and obsolescence of the central city and the creation of a cosmopolitan postmodern landscape in the suburbs. In this light, recent suburbanization appears as a material and ideological process that reinforced consumerism, political apathy and cultural impoverishment and contributed to the survival of a destructive and unsustainable mode of urban growth.

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### 3

## Messogia, the New 'Eleftherios Venizelos Airport' and 'Attiki Odos'

or, the Double Marginalization of Messogia

by Dimitra Gefou-Madianou

**T**he 1990s mark a great, aggressive expansion of the city of Athens to the whole Attica region. This took place in the context of modernizing and development projects, which initiated the neo-liberal 'restructuring' of Greece and amidst discourses, of Greece's becoming at last a "fully European country", affluent, strong and important regionally and globally. The climax of this process was its undertaking the organization of the Olympic Games of 2004 and the numerous, huge infrastructure projects which supported this organization, many of them located in the Messogia region. Prominent among them are the new Athens 'Eleftherios Venizelos Airport' and the Attica Expressway (Highway, Freeway) named 'Attiki Odos', but also the horse-racing and shooting grounds of Athens (which were moved to Messogia from Athens, not far from the airport), international hotels and business/shopping centers. These constructions have had tremendous repercussions on the organization of space, its social and political uses for the entire region of Messogia.

The airport in particular became the emblem of success of the then modernizing PASOK government and was wrapped with discourses of glory, Hellenic grandeur and triumph of Europeanness. Along with the majority of the Greek population, most of the local people embraced the project enthusiastically because they considered it to be an avenue for a long desired access to modernity. As it happens, the Arvanites of Messogia have long been 'closed' communities culturally and politically marginalized by central power structures and were considered as backward and uncivilized by the dominant Athenian elite (Gefou-Madianou, 1999). For more than a century the Arvanites of Messogia were molded into a subaltern community in the service of the nearby capital city which got steadily gigantic in terms of population and socio-

economic influence. Their language, 'Arvanitica', questioned their Greekness and this together with the use of 'retsina' wine by the locals (which turned them into the eyes of Athenians into drunkards) led to violently dismissive characterizations, which amounted to mockery and led to political and economic exploitation (*ibid*).

Certainly this picture had already started to change in the 1980s, due to the gradual expansion of Athens, the industrialization of the area and the ensuing internal migration. This process was intensified in the 1990s with massive flows of 'economic' immigrants, many of them from Albania (first wave) and then from Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), who reinforced available work force and increased local productivity in all sectors and especially the agricultural one. Yet, the locals' embodiment of the subaltern status, died hard—even if they had themselves become 'masters', so to speak. Today the Messogia communities have become cities and their population has tripled.

In this context, the airport construction was perceived as a sign of openness (culture and language-wise) to modernization and cosmopolitanism, hence it's enthusiastic reception. At the same time, any critical voices were muted. There were more reasons for this positive stance, some material, other symbolic, even imagined. The value of land increased making some people rapidly rich either through land expropriation for the construction of the big projects (the new airport and 'Attiki Odos') or through the dramatic changes in the uses of land. Land formerly exclusively reserved for agriculture (or forest/public) was now turned into residential, business and industrial zones. Access to the capital city from which many Messogites felt 'excluded' became quick and easy, at least for the first years. On a symbolic level, locals felt that the capital was moving towards them via the airport and they felt they had become "from a periphery, the center of Attica". Messogites have appropriated the airport in many ways vividly integrating it into their life-worlds and everyday activities: shopping, entertainment, jobs and leisure time activities (Gefou-Madianou 2010). The fact that the airport was situated on their fathers' vineyards has probably invested it with "ownership" meanings. And all this imaginary of progress and modernity have underplayed and suppressed all the dramatic changes which the airport construction and operation had generated.

First it was the landscape and their relationship to the land, to their fathers' land. The "Messogitic plain" (*kambos*) was lost forever. Vineyards were destroyed; the vine cultivation and wine production, the area's most central and century-long cultural and economic characteristics were irreparably upset; small hills were taken down; olive trees were uprooted; agricultural roads were deviated or more often destroyed; archaeological excavation sites were ruined; little out-churches were moved to other places and in some cases removed

altogether. The topography of the area changed radically. All previously known signs and markers of places leading to peoples' properties and fields were eliminated, thus making orientation in space and property location very difficult, especially for older people. The absence of a central 'ktimatologio' (cadastre) in the area complicated the situation even more. Old people were worried, and still are, that their children would not be able to locate their fields and the remaining vineyards (ibid).

It was during this period that Messogia region progressively started turning into a 'disordered' space. The whole process of preparations for the new airport and 'Attiki Odos' constructions (land expropriation, immense digging, uprooting of vineyards, other cultivations, olive trees and forest), the flows of workers and migrants moving into an already over-populated area, the expansion of industrial zone in the area, the building of villas and other illegal houses with no residential plan, all these and the lack of administrative control generated pictures of a deregulated space.

'Attiki Odos' has split the Messogia region into two, thus making inter-community communication difficult and expensive, sometimes breaking up a community, therefore making social life hard. Work in the vineyards and fields, an everyday activity for some locals became difficult, even impossible for older people—for driving in the highway was impossible for them, due to the speed, the strong lights in the night, and the traffic signs. Thus, the cultivators' relationship with their land was changed dramatically or even destroyed.

Many people had pointed to an upcoming environmental catastrophe (air and land pollution, affecting cultivation products and food chain) but general euphoria silenced their voices. After all, these concerns were problems of the less economically privileged Messogites. The wealthier and those espousing the modernization agenda at that time, saw and expected only benefits and opportunities, envisioning a share of the airport 'movement' and commotion: of incoming tourists visiting the area and reinforcing consumption and commercial activity; of attracting big construction projects such as condominiums, hotels, shopping-malls and urban housing-projects, promising jobs and wealth for the local population.

All movements against the airport and 'Attiki Odos' construction organized by local activists (archaeologists, environmentalists, geologists, artists, school teachers and some local mayors) failed in mounting opposition. The PASOK government was very strong at the time and had succeeded to attract the support of a large segment of the locals, who were traditionally conservative and in favour of the monarchy (traditionally named King's villages—'*vassilochoria*'). Local politicians played an important role in the negotiations and the manufacturing of consent.

The airport was inaugurated in 2001 along with the main part of 'Attiki Odos' leading to it; the rest of it was completed in 2003-04. While during the first years of their operation, both the airport and 'Attiki Odos' were easily accessible to Messogites—hence these images of appropriation and welcoming—just before, during and increasingly after the Olympic Games of 2004 the situation changed dramatically. It was then that it became clear what this 'progress' and development implied; what this brutal and neo-liberal modernity was aiming at; and how it thoroughly reorganized the logic of public space. Both the airport and 'Attiki Odos' turned into quasi-private, confined enclaves as 'barriers' were set up limiting access to them. The airport was controlled and policed for security and order reasons; free parking was prohibited, and controlled parking was expensive; walking around, window-shopping, and promenading (as was done before) was not allowed. Commuting for work or visiting relatives and friends from one Messogitic town to the other(s) became difficult, time-consuming and expensive. The airport was transformed into an area of strict discipline. At the same time, access to and operation of 'Attiki Odos' was strictly organized; the highway was constantly patrolled; toll-stations increased; driving through it was considered by locals complicated and expensive. But most importantly, all these generated a sense of alienation. They felt the place was 'other' to them, or themselves 'others' in this place.

This neoliberal space-logic became more clear and visible to many with the eruption of the recent economic crisis in the country and the area of Messogia. Class differences have become more evident, for some locals became rich by expropriating land or by turning it into residential plots (*oikopeda*). One can now more clearly discern two groups of people in Messogia. On the one hand are those who consider themselves modern and identify with the state hegemonic discourse aiming at progress in the community, thus still in favor of the airport and 'Attiki Odos'. They represent wealthy, strong local families who had always been able in forcing amnesia and the orchestrating of forgetting regarding certain periods of the past, like their Arvanitic past or the Civil War. On the other hand are those less economically privileged locals, usually agricultural cultivators who are experiencing all these changes with distrust and bitterness (Gefou-Madianou 2014).

Yet both groups encounter pollution problems—both in the atmospheric air and on the ground. These have become more evident in the recent years, affecting people and cultivations, and they are attributed both to the new airport and 'Attiki Odos' but also to the local industries' chemical waste. From recent examinations it was found that the water table in the area is contaminated and the air is heavily polluted. A photochemical cloud very often covers the whole area and the fields adjacent to 'Attiki Odos' are also heavily

polluted. The food chain also seems to have been affected by this pollution (Stouraitis and Methenitis 2013), thus making agricultural products unsuitable for sale. Some areas suffer serious noise problems from air traffic. Shops are closing down in the Messogitic cities, jobs are not easily found in the area, and as result many immigrants are leaving it. 'Attiki Odos' is progressively less used by Messogites because of gas cost and the toll ticket, which are considered expensive. They prefer to travel by the old agricultural roads or take the bus and/or the 'Metro' when they visit Athens for work or other business. Only a small percentage of the population (mainly the wealthy), still use the 'Attiki Odos' on a somewhat regular basis.

For the average-income Messogites or the economically disadvantaged ones space is more alienated than ever. Especially for the vineyard owners this feeling of 'otherness' is more prominent. Their land has become a 'no place'—neither agricultural or industrial, nor urban; they themselves feel neither agricultural cultivators, nor urbanites; they do not know what they are any more. The new big constructions on their land, namely the airport and 'Attiki Odos' brought dramatic changes to the area and also generated a cultural impoverishment of their lives. They are experiencing a sense of severe alienation and feel double marginalized and confined by the whole situation. The dream and prospect for 'progress' and 'modernity', which the new airport and 'Attiki Odos' have promised seem to have failed irretrievably.

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## 4

# Infrastructural Flows, Interruptions and Stasis in Athens of the Crisis

by Dimitris Dalakoglou and Yannis Kallianos<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2011, representatives of the Athenian elites made a series of biopolitical statements regarding the anti-austerity movement of Syntagma Square<sup>2</sup>. In order to justify their political opposition to the camp-styled protest gathered across from the House of Parliament they argued that the protestors posed a risk to public health and to the city's public image. Following the final police attack on the camp in July 2011, municipal cleaning workers were immediately brought in, to collect the broken tents and other items of the destroyed protest-camp and throw them into the refuse trucks. In yet one more sign of social deregulation, the very same people who have been forced several times to call a halt to their industrial actions on the basis that their strikes pose a 'public health risk', were now the same ones who were obliged to finish off the police operation which was legitimized based on the same argument. Four months later, in October 2011 this story was once again repeated, when these municipal workers were forced, by court order, to abandon their strike and go back to work, due to the risk to public health.

The strikes of workers in the city's cleaning service have proved critical moments in the life of the city. It is at these moments when its dwellers are confronted with their own and their neighbours' waste. The criticality is based precisely on the pause of the flow of refuse. Such interruptions bring the less noticeable aspects of the infrastructural flows to the forefront of the senses (vision, smell etc.) A process that echoes the argument of Humphrey

(2003) who has stressed the value of infrastructure and its flows for social order, examining the case of another infrastructural interruption, heat, in a post-soviet city. Indeed such ethnographic material confirms once again Mary Douglas' (2008) definition of disorder as the interruption of a pattern. These interruptions and disorders materialize in everyday life of the critical mass the completely socially embedded—and socially invisible by then—infrastructural existence that is based on the flows and their rhythms. Moreover, the disorder can be caused by the lack of the infrastructural flow altogether without ever starting and so paused, as it has been argued in the case of the highways in Albania (Dalakoglou, 2012). Thus, it can also be the material affordances of an infrastructure which imply certain flow/activities and thus the pattern's discontinuity and disorder. To extend this argument even further, it is also the entire lack of an infrastructural materiality or the promise for the construction of an infrastructure in the future that may trigger particular flows or interruptions and thus disorders and other socio-material phenomena.

Overall what is important for our case is the infrastructural flow and its discontinuities which then activate, mobilize or challenge other kinds of flows in the city ultimately re-defining the urban condition. These diverse (non)flows may then become an intriguing point in the study of infrastructures and specifically of the infrastructural dynamics which they make possible in different contexts and levels. In this sense, the infrastructure per se is not a fixed rigid category, it is not even a substratum or medium, it is a matter of affinities that take shape (or not) (Mitropoulos, 2013:116). Therefore, an approach to the 'infrastructure of experience' (Dourish & Bell, 2007:417) or even better to the experience of infrastructure, shows that discontinuities and arrhythmia are the rule of the infrastructural (non-)affinities, rather than the exception. As such, the question emerging becomes: what are the differentiations among the various interruptions and disorders? Before trying to answer this question, some ethnographic elaboration is necessary at this stage.

### Waste-Money-Water-Soil-Bodies

Four ethnographic observations are clear in reference to waste infrastructures and flows. The first three were pre-existing conditions which took on different meanings since the outbreak of the crisis and the fourth is directly linked with the 2010 crisis. First, everyday life in Fili town (where the landfill of Athens is located) is unbearable due to the waste treatment facilities and flows. Second, there is an inability and difficulty for the Greek authorities to find



spaces to situate new waste treatment infrastructures. Third, waste treatment is big business and implies big flows of money. Fourth, there are significant transformations in everyday flows of waste, starting at the bins in the city.

Starting from the latter, an evident fact is that since 2010 there is an increasing number of scavengers looking for valuable materials (usually scrap metals) within the city's recycling or mixed garbage bins. Several individuals scout the area around bins for things that might come in handy. Additionally the number of people who just search for food in rubbish bins has also greatly increased. Austerity policies have rapidly created a new level of extreme poverty, the most 'fortunate' social classes simply consume less (generating less garbage) while the lowest classes struggle to survive, sifting through and consuming the rubbish of the others. Starvation in Greece and the life of the starving people is an entirely separate issue that needs to be addressed, but probably this has to happen in political rather than academic contexts. For now, what one can state is that the aforementioned phenomena lead to a decrease in the volume of the rubbish that flow toward the landfill.

#### *In the land(of)Fili*

During the last two decades and due to pre-crisis economic growth Greece has experienced a significant increase in the volume of waste. The predominant method for waste management in the country is landfilling. Up until 2005, 90% of all refuse was disposed in sanitary landfills and open dumps. Today, almost 80% of urban waste ends up in landfills<sup>3</sup>. In Attica, even though more than eight dumpsites are in use, only one of these is operating legally—this is the landfill in Fili town<sup>4</sup>.

Fili town is almost 20km from the centre of the city. It emerged in 1997 from the unification of a group of municipalities: Zefyri, Fili and Ano Liosia, where the landfill is actually located. The name Ano Liosia or just Liosia often exacts negative reactions partly in reference to the Roma people who reside there but primarily due to the landfill and the pollution associated with it. The name 'Fili' is less charged than Liosia, however it has gradually taken on similar negative connotations. One of the ethnographic anecdotes accompanying the relationship between the city center and Fili is that of teenagers waiting for the bus. When they were asked for information regarding their destination along the bus route they pretended that they were getting off well before Fili and yet they remained on the bus until Fili, which probably fills them with shame.

The site has been used since the 1950s as the main dumpsite of Attica and has been extended twice to accommodate the capital's trash disposal demands. It is currently burdened with around 10,000 tons of garbage per

day, triple the volume of refuse that it has been designed to accommodate<sup>5</sup>. Currently the landfill's total surface area is over 1,000 acres. The present site has a depth of 500 meters, 250 metres underground and 250 metres above ground. This is next to the old inactive landfills of Ano Liosia 1 and 2 and the inactive Ano Liosia dumpsite. The site is built very near the town, and less than 300 metres away from residences. Indeed the settlement closest to the landfill is the Gennimatas workers' dwellings (the Greek equivalent of a council estate). Some of the last houses built in the area were built in 2012, just before the closure of the public organisation that was tasked with building them.

The landfill is strictly guarded by threatening security staff and the facilities are surrounded by a 3-metre high barbed-wired fence. Despite this, one can see vehicles carrying toilet waste entering through the landfill gates. Such vehicles are not supposed to unload their refuse in the landfill, but, as the cost for disposing of such liquids in purpose-built facilities is very high, it is easier to go the 'other way'. Parallel to the inflows of waste is the inflow of money toward the Fili landfill, both formal but probably also informal given the aforementioned example. Each municipal authority of Attica (wider Athens) pays Fili municipality per ton of waste deposited at the landfill—moreover, money from the central state authorities also flows towards Fili. This condition likely makes Fili one of the wealthiest municipal authorities in the country. No doubt various local micro-contractors receive a share of this wealth via small contracts that the municipal or the landfill authorities allocate. However, despite this, the town does not look like a particularly wealthy place, certainly not one which invests in its public services. Simultaneously the fetid smell of rotting waste is present in the air people breathe 24 hours per day.

There seems to be a wider plexus of socially and/or legally accepted but indeed also unaccepted in/out-flows taking place in the landfill. According to the official announcement of the inter-municipal authority published on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013<sup>6</sup>, at least six times during that month dangerous medical/hospital waste was discovered inside the landfill. The incidents involved private corporations who illegally smuggle toxic or harmful waste into the landfill (hospital or other kind of debris that is not legally allowed to be refused there). Moreover from June 2013 until January 2014 the operation of the infrastructure has been disrupted and suspended eleven times (this is the official number) because of the invasions of scavengers who look for valuable scrap and other materials. These are usually the Roma people who live next to the site as well as poor immigrants, however, gradually as the crisis progresses some people who do not belong to either of these two categories have begun to appear.

Landfill technology is based on the burial of the waste within the soil. In Greek a landfill is colloquially referred to as *homateri*—etymologically this derives from the Greek word for soil, *homa*=χώμα. However it is not only garbage that comes and gets buried in Fili; there are bodies also: human bodies have often been discovered in *homateri*. These bodies originate from two main sources. Firstly, the unfortunate scavengers are often accidentally crushed by the tons of garbage which come all day while searching for something valuable. However, more sinisterly the *homateri* is also used by criminal organizations who apparently make use of the landfill or rubbish bins in the city for disposing bodies or body parts.

According to the bible soil is the cosmogonical element per se (together with water). Thus, according to the Christian Orthodox tradition after death the body which allegedly was made out of these two materials must return to the soil<sup>7</sup>. According to local residents in Fili the pollution created by the *homateri* leads to a massive percentage increase of deaths by cancer in the area; that is the reason the main term the anti-landfill residents' initiative uses is cancerlandfill (*karkinohomateri*=καρκινοχωματερή). In addition, not only is it responsible for the deaths but the *homateri* continues to torment the bodies of the Fili residents into the afterlife. The current graveyard of the town is built on the hill that remains behind inactive cell of the Ano Liosia landfill. Bodies buried there do not decompose, due to the pollution in the soil that has destroyed the underground flora and fauna which aids decomposition. 'Dead soil for the dead people' is how one of Fili's residents referred to it. The only solution has been to build cement boxes for the coffins to be put in. Sometimes soil bought separately in plastic sacks is poured in the box before the gravestone is put in place sealing the bodies, so that at least if and when exhumations occur the gravediggers or relatives do not come across practically undecomposed bodies. The other cosmogonical element of the Judeochristianic tradition, water, flows in the opposite direction to the garbage. Very close the *homateri* is the channel of Mornos River. This artificial channel contains water flowing towards the capital city, poorly maintained the cement-made canal has water pouring out of its cracks, while at points it is completely uncovered exchanging elements with the environment and thus the *homateri*. The channel's rectangular cement walls echo the small rectangular cement grave boxes.

### *Contesting landfills*

Over the last decade or so the government has made plans to build two new landfills in Attica. The two new sites proposed are next to the towns of Keratea and Grammatiko. In the case of Keratea, a small town in East Attica, local

opposition against the building of a landfill culminated in a major physical conflict between riot police and the community that lasted from December 2010 until March 2011, forcing the halting of the 'investment'. Police violence in Keratea was extreme and the local residents responded dynamically to what was a proper invasion of Special Forces of the police into the town and in its periphery. The community blockaded one of the major highway artery and almost daily clashes occurred.

Generally local residents in both places and others throughout the country (e.g. Lefkimi in Corfu) have radically resisted the proposals as they expect an environmental and public health catastrophe similar to the one of Fili. Moreover, the most notorious—for corruption—private/public works contracting company in the country has undertaken the building of the new sites<sup>8</sup>. At the same time the terms of agreement do not appear to be protective of the Greek state's interests. For example, according to a documentary film produced by the federation of municipal workers union (POE-OTA 2013) the new facilities will be in reality private businesses, while the capacities of these planned infrastructures is much larger than the expected generation of garbage. Nevertheless the contracts for new landfills signed between the state and private contractors instruct that the state will pay the managing companies based on capacity, rather than weight of wasted matter (as is the case with Fili). For the time being what has flown from the centre of the city towards these future landfill areas are riot police officers who protect the private investments and try to implement the wishes of the government to make the country an investment-friendly territory. Diggers and other machinery has also flown there for now from elsewhere, since no local sub-contractor wants to get involved in this work. Moreover, money flows from state coffers towards the private contractor who is receiving compensation for work delays due to protests.

### Disorder, Crisis and Stasis

The government and corporate media often employ arguments that try to turn the residents of the three areas against each other; for example, arguments about local villagers who do not care about the common good or who do not want Fili to get a lighter or not load of waste are used. The public health argument is also employed. The residents of Keratea and Grammatiko as well as those from Fili, who protest, are accused of posing a danger to public health and order. However, does the government care so much for the environmental impact in Fili or even for public order? After all, similarly to Keratea, the use of extreme police violence is also visible in Northern Greece, in Chalkidiki, where gold

mining ‘investments’ are resisted by the local residents who (rightly) believe that the gold mines will destroy the natural and social environment in their area. Public disorder prevails and is implemented by rigid political decisions which instruct for the investments to be carried out by all means, if necessary with illegal arrests, severe injuries of protestors and even with large-scale anti-terrorist operations targeting local residents.

The argument which wants these infrastructures to be necessary for wider social and public order and the rhythmic and normal flow of waste (in our case) are not convincing. First of all the infrastructures and their flows are interrupted, paused and delayed daily. These interruptions are embedded in the process, in the regular rhythm and pattern of the flow, they are not exceptional. For example when people enter homateri searching for valuable items the work of the infrastructure and the flows are paused, when bodies are discovered in homateri its function is also paused, when the municipal vehicles stop to empty rubbish bin in the city the flow of vehicles behind them is also interrupted, etc.

On a different scale, everyday life in Fili is a constant interruption and disturbance with the stinking air which is probably toxic and lethal, with waste tracks speeding daily via the roads of the town and with people dying on mass scale due to the pollution. Simultaneously the water of the capital city flows next to the homateri. Overall, disorder is the rule rather than exception of this large system. When it comes to this waste infrastructure and its flows, disorder and arrhythmia are part of the ‘normal’ infrastructural patterns for the people who have direct experience of the infrastructure. Perhaps these disorders are embedded in a system that wishes to devaluate as much as possible the function of the current infrastructure and push towards the new private units. Probably Fili landfill has reached its physical and social limits.

On a larger scale, disorder, disruptions and deregulation are endemic characteristics of neoliberal governance—especially in its most extreme form, as it is being applied in Greece since the agreement of 2010 with the IMF, the EU and the ECB. For example, until recent times the state authorities were responsible for a multiplicity of flows, e.g. provision of social housing to vulnerable groups, managing waste flows, construction and extension of infrastructures etc. However, now in the times of crisis the most social of these activities have been paused from above while the most profitable have been or are in the process of being privatised. As such, during the crisis all of the previously existing patterns have been interrupted but from above. Thus, the only flows that remain uninterrupted are flows of public assets towards the private sector and the flow of violence against anyone who may resist such policies.

The question hereby posed is therefore what might distinguish these systemic interruptions and disorder from the interruptions and disorder that come from protests: whether we talk about striking municipal workers, the Syntagma Square occupation or anti-landfill struggles, these incidents function as an oppositional force to the systemic flows (including their disorders and interruptions). This is the reason that representatives of the elites are so harshly against these flows trying to protect the disruptions caused from above. So as one needs to start thinking anew these disruptions and disorders as qualitatively different phenomena, the use of another term needs to be employed, that of *stasis*. Stasis in that sense can refer to non-systemic interruptions of flows and non-systemic disorders, which have anti-structural potentialities. Stasis challenges the neoliberal normality and its rhythms which include the systemically embedded disorders and interruption of patterns.

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## Endnotes

- 1 We thank very much Anna Christofidi for helping us with this article and various people in Fyli, especially H. and D. for their help, moreover many thanks go to Antonis Vradis, Christos Filippidis and Klara Jaya Brekke for their help.
- 2 Those issuing such biopolitical statements were the current and former mayor of the city, the president of the merchants' association, governmental ministers, corporate media journalists etc. See [http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_ell\\_100033\\_09/07/2011\\_448731](http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_ell_100033_09/07/2011_448731) [http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/\\_w\\_articles\\_politics\\_100017\\_09/07/2011\\_448709](http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_politics_100017_09/07/2011_448709) <http://www.skai.gr/news/greece/article/174513/protovoulia-kamini-gia-tin-plateia-sudagmatos> <http://www.newsbeast.gr/politiki/arthro/198924/prepei-na-katharisei-i-plateia-sudagmatos/>
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- 5 <http://www.kathimerini.gr/491991/article/epikairothta/ellada/apovlhta-apomykono-ston-xyta-ths-fylhs>
- 6 <http://www.edsna.gr/index.php/info/press-romm-2/354-nosokomeiaka-6>
- 7 Cremation was illegal in Greece until 2006 because of pressure applied by the Church of Greece.
- 8 This is almost inevitable since the law was reformed in the 1990s allowing only companies of a certain size to undertake mega-infrastructure constructions. For almost a decade the very few such companies saw their profits increase immensely, yet the crisis and pause in public works led to the survival of only one such company.





## 5

### Athens as a Failed City for Consumption (In a World that Evaluates Everyone and Every Place by their Commodity Value)

by Andreas Chatzidakis

#### A Consumer City in the Making

I grew up in Athens throughout the 80s and 90s, in the midst of a transition period that brought dramatic changes to the Athenian cityscape. In many ways, the “ancient city” was in a fully-blown and ferocious transformation into a “consumer city”. For despite the ubiquitous view of the Acropolis and other ancient sites, Athens began to look more like any other European “future-oriented” city: introducing some of the biggest shopping malls in Southeast Europe, iconic buildings by celebrity architects, bigger and wider motorways for ever-so-bigger and wider cars, new museums, urban lofts, retail parks, theme parks, and various new cafés, artspace and multi-purpose buildings for an emerging and increasingly confident “creative class” (Florida, 2002). By 2004, the year of hosting Olympics, Athens was keen to erase its more recent memories and eager to fetishise antiquity in its rebranding as a world-class destination. Major facelifts and investments in urban infrastructure had turned the city itself into an alluring object of consumption: contemporary yet rich in history, sophisticated, even as “chic” as Paris<sup>1</sup> and as “creative” as Berlin<sup>2</sup>, and above all full of opportunities for consumption catering to all cosmopolitan tastes and sensibilities.

But the transition of Athens into a city of consumption was far more pronounced not in the physical surroundings but in the everyday logics and practices of its residents. In the neighbourhood I grew up, and which in many ways epitomised the Greek model of urban gentrification, the formation of new subjectivities akin to the neoliberal consumer-citizen began to manifest in all spheres of daily life. At least for some time, nearly everyone seemed blessed with the freedom of experimentation and identity differentiation through the acquisition of an ever-expanding list of consumption objects. Soon it became not only about *what* people were consuming but also *where*, marking the formation of neighbourhoods with distinct class identities. Popular songs and TV series, for instance, narrated stories of people from different districts of Athens (middle versus working class) that were to fall in love and strive a life together despite different class-related tastes and sensibilities. For a city that never underwent a process of heavy industrialisation and class-stratification, as for example Paris or London, this was a remarkable cultural shift. Concurrently, some academic studies began to take note of Greece's transition from a "collectivist" to an "individualist" culture (e.g. Pouliasi and Verkuyten, 2011).

### A Contested Consumer City

The years of the Athenian spectacle ended violently and abruptly in December 2008, uncovering various underlying tensions and contradictions, not least in the consumption-led model of urban development (see Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2012). Capitalist "cracks" (Holloway, 2010) and "societies within societies" (Papi, 2003) began to appear in various parts of Athens and beyond. One of the most striking examples, for instance, was what is now known as "Navarinou park" or "the park", a former parking lot that was turned into an open squat by Exarcheia-based residents (and other enthusiastic supporters) who, in the aftermath of the 2008 riots: "...united to squat on the space and demand the obvious, that the parking turns into a park! They broke the asphalt with drills and cutters, they brought trucks carrying soil, planted flowers and trees and in the end they celebrated it"<sup>3</sup>. Operating on the basis of self-management, anti-hierarchical structuring and anti-commercialisation, the park aspired to be:

...a space for creativity, emancipation and resistance, open to various initiatives, such as political, cultural and anti-consumerist ones. At the same time, it aspires to be a neighbourhood garden which accommodates part of the social life of its residents, is beyond any profit or ownership-driven logics and functions as a place for playing and walking, meeting and

communicating, sports, creativity and critical thinking. The park defies constraints relating to different ages, origins, educational level, social and economic positioning<sup>4</sup>.

Consumerist society and atomised logics and practices were at the heart of critique in various other “here and now” experimentations with doing things differently. There was a collective, for instance, that directly traded with Zapatistas and various other alternative trading networks that brought together politically like-minded producers and consumers without intermediaries. There were also various no-ticket cinema screenings, collective cooking events, time banks, gifting bazaars and “anti-consumerist” spaces where people could come and give, take, or give and take goods without any norms of reciprocity. For a consumer researcher, post-2008 Athens seemed to be an ultimate laboratory where alternative tactics of consumer resistance and modes of consumer-oriented activism were constantly tried out.

### A Failed Consumer City

Fast forward five years, however, theories and critiques of consumerist society and possessive individualism (Graeber, 2011) have to a certain extent been made redundant. As Skoros, an anti-consumerist collective put it:

“When we started Skoros... everything was easier. It was much easier to propose anti-consumerism, re-use, recycling and sharing practices. Later however the economic crisis arrived—of course the social and cultural crises pre-existed—and made us feel awkward. How can one speak of anti-consumerism when people’s spending power has shrunk considerably? How can one propose a critique of consumerist needs when people struggle to meet their basic needs?...”

(leaflet by Skoros, Dec 2011).

Indeed, Athens is now by and large inhabited by people who can no longer fully express themselves on the basis of *what* they consume and *where*. Their city is no longer a “world-class” city for consumption (Miles, 2010) and cannot pretend to be so either. After all, it is the capital and by far most populous city of the first developed country to be downgraded to “emerging” market status<sup>5</sup>. By 2014, the average Greek salary was reduced by 40%<sup>6</sup>. In many ways, the consequences are far more pronounced in Athens than anywhere else. The once well-to-do Athenian middle-classes now parallel the world’s so-called “emerging middle-classes” in reverse, experiencing everyday precariousness and the fears

of “falling from the middle” (Kravets and Sandikci, 2014)—and straight onto the poverty zone—in an unprecedented magnitude and scale. Increasingly, Athenians approximate Europe’s “defective” and “disqualified” consumers (Bauman, 2011, 2007), unable to fully define themselves neither in terms of what they consume nor what they produce: with unemployment rates hitting a record 27% across the entire population and over 50% among the youth<sup>7</sup>.

Present-day Athens is the world’s “failed” consumer city *par excellence*: comprising “zombie” retailscapes for increasingly disempowered consumers who still mourn the dramatic decline of their spending power and unfulfilled consumer desires that seem all the more unreachable. I have seen, for instance, various individuals visiting gifting bazaars and desperately trying to revive consumer fantasies and a “customer ethos” remnant of a not-so-distant past where much of their leisure time was spent around department stores. I have heard of others that walk into stores and pay a small deposit to reserve items, pretending they don’t know that they know it is no longer possible to return to buy them. In a (European) society of consumers, “a world that evaluates anyone and anything by their commodity value” (Bauman, 2007, p. 124), both Athens and its residents have comparatively little, if any, status.

To the untrained eye—and a remaining Athenian elite that still lives within secluded walls of excess and affluence—it may be difficult to fully grasp the depth and the breadth of such failure. After all it is still possible to *consume* Athens subject to (carefully) guided tours and the (fragile) success of various “re-thinking” and “rebranding” projects<sup>8,9</sup>. According to the *New York Times*, for instance, the city is “surging back”, a testament to that “vibrancy and innovation can even bloom in hard times”<sup>10</sup>. Potential visitors are rest assured that various neighbourhoods have witnessed a “resurgence”, are “quickly gentrifying” and getting a “cultural lift”<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, some streets of Athens are still buzzing and there are various new “entertainment zones” where opportunities for hedonistic pursuits and “experiential consumption” (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) abide. But the proliferation of new cafés and budget eateries is also understood in the context of the heroic Athenian entrepreneur who, facing dire prospects, invests in small businesses with low start-up cost and (at least) some potential of reasonable profit margins. More profoundly perhaps, they can be understood in the context of the (failing) Athenian consumer, who having lost their ability to assert themselves through more traditional performances of conspicuous consumption, invest in “low-involvement” yet symbolic daily expenditures instead. Put differently, these new sites of consumption represent a very last but much-needed resort for consumption-mediated expressions of identity positioning and differentiation.

## Athens is Calling: From Solidarity Across Difference and Distance to “In-Group” Solidarity

“...How can we insist that ‘we are not a charity’ when poverty is next to us, around and above us and it is growing massively? How to counterpropose solidarity and community when the crisis isolates individuals and makes them turn against each other?...”

(leaflet by Skoros, Dec 2011)

Against such dystopian present, solidarity was bound to surface as a keyword. But it is hardly a new word in the streets of Athens. In my first systematic photographic recordings of graffiti, posters and various flyers around the city (back in 2008), “solidarity” was already everywhere: from calls in support of comrades facing juridical charges to supporting under-paid (and non-paid) workers; from Athens to Mexico and into Palestine; from race to age and into gender. Soon after the crisis, however, discourses of solidarity diversified and multiplied. Various social actors began counter-proposing their own solidarity logics and practices. The notion itself became a symbolic battlefield where even the most accountable for peoples’ misfortunes claimed part of the pile. The government, for instance, soon introduced its own version of additional “solidarity taxes”. It was now as if all other taxes did not have to do with solidarity. Meanwhile, in collaboration with various marketplace and religious actors, Sky TV—a pro-establishment broadcaster—launched a relatively successful campaign titled “Oloi Mazi Mporoume” (United We Can), comprising “actions for the collection of food, medication and clothes for those who need them as well as scholarships for those children that want to further their education but cannot due to financial difficulties”<sup>12</sup>. Any willingness left to extend solidarity across difference and distance was therefore displaced into firmly depoliticised acts of pitifulness, supporting an implicit ontological understanding of the crisis as accidental rather than systemic (Harvey, 2010), a temporary rather than prolonged state of being (Agamben, 2004). Thanks to Sky TV’s campaign Greece’s youth could still further their education had *they wanted to*; and presumably enjoy a life of linear chronological progress (i.e. from education to full-time employment) once the painful years of crisis are over.

Concurrently the strengthening of ingroup-outgroup categorisations and practices of othering undermined universal solidarity. For instance, Golden Dawn, a political party with explicit links to Nazi ideology and which won 7% of the vote in the last national elections (July 2012), performed solidarity through the creation of migrant-free zones (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2010).

Among others, proudly Greek citizens concerned with the rise of migrant-led crime could now enjoy benefits such as guarded walks to ATMs. A kind of walk that for psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein could be read as the projection of paranoid-schizoid mechanisms into the other: including migrants, antifascists and homosexuals. Soon Golden Dawn also introduced soup kitchens and solidarity trading initiatives ‘from-Greeks-for-Greeks-only’. As I have illustrated elsewhere (Chatzidakis, 2013) the struggle was no longer only about urban space but also the phantasmic realm of commodities. From Zapatistas coffee to so-called “fascist rice” (rice circulated in solidarity trading networks by right-wing producers) and “blood strawberries” (named after the racist shooting and injuring of migrant strawberry pickers by their bosses) the Athenian’s shopping basket was full of street-level politics.

For most Athenians, solidarity therefore failed to channel itself into more politically progressive realms. If anything, it was the family institution and the notion of intergenerational family solidarity that took centre-stage to firefight the gaps left by the dramatic cuts in standards of living and the demise of the welfare state. Moving back with the parents and grandparents, having extended family meals, sharing salaries and consumption objects and trying to get rid of these that once a sign of freedom had now become burdens (e.g. expensive cars) became part of daily life. In Athens and beyond, an increasing number of people had no choice but to rediscover the pleasures and the perils of (extended) family living.

### Athens in the Here and Now

“...We are not sorry at all, quite the contrary, that the current socio-economic system is in a deep crisis and we try, being part of the society, to put human lives above profits. In a capitalist system that is reaching its end, we are not going to feel nostalgic about the illusions of happiness offered by consumerist lifestyles but we are going instead to seek for novelty. We pose questions around degrowth, issues of scale and balance, and we deny the hegemony of financial profits. We propose small, “self-managed” communities and not gigantic multinational enterprises. We believe in solidarity, social support and collaboration and not in charitable giving. We are part of society, not its rescuers. Our suggestion is simple. We produce and share goods, services, knowledge. We become independent of the old structures and develop new ones. These new structures will cultivate an environment that will allow a way out of the current economic, social and cultural crisis. A way out on the basis of equality and justice...”  
(leaflet by Skoros, December 2011).

For those with an alternative vision of public and community life, one less mediated by consumption, the crisis represented a threat but also a welcomed opportunity for the cultivation of new ways of doing and thinking politics. An increasingly popular movement of “de-growth” (Latouche, 2009), for instance, called for redefining urban (and national) wealth not in economic terms but quality of life, social relations, equality and justice. But present-day Athens is far from having entered such “virtuous circle of quiet contraction” (Latouche, 2009). Consumers of the spectacular Olympics and super-sized shopping malls were forced to embrace less materialistic lifestyles but not on the basis of voluntary downshifting or some kind of “alternative hedonism” (Soper et al. 2009). Their way of living changed drastically but their political (consumer) subjectivities proved to be rather less versatile.

Concurrently, new politics of time and space stretched the Athenian antagonist movement to its limits. The utopian “here and now”, which largely inspired the formation of various “societies within societies” (Papi, 2003) and experimentations with doing things differently, was soon confronted by the “here and now” of the crisis: a different kind of spatio-temporal logic focused less on ideological imperatives and more on here and now pragmatism, an urge to attend to people’s immediate needs. In their attempt to firefight the various gaps left by the welfare state and to respond to multiple calls for solidarity beyond traditional territories, some social movements went on “automatic pilot” (emic term). Ideological principles had to be bracketed off, paying emphasis on “urgency”. For example, although alternative and solidarity-based economies continued to proliferate the imperative for “fair” and “transparent” rather than “low” prices became somewhat redundant. For most people participation in alternative trading networks simply made sense in their quest for lower prices. It was hard to blame them for doing so whilst watching them nearing (and falling below) the poverty line. Likewise, Skoros, the anti-consumerist collective who took a conscious decision to provide solidarity for all, soon turned into a space of “over-consumption”, catering to an increasing population of failed consumers who kept coming back to acquire more stuff they did not really need but could no longer purchase in the conventional marketplace.

There is currently widespread fatigue, anxiety, and an “overwhelming sense of futility” (Ross, 2014)<sup>13</sup> in the streets of Athens. But some find it hard to stop thinking and dreaming rather more dangerously. After all, the history of their city reminds that there will always be potential turning points and critical junctures that can trigger radical upheavals.

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## Endnotes

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- 3 <http://parkingparko.espivblogs.net/englishfrench/about-the-park/>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-06-11/greece-first-developed-market-cut-to-emerging-as-uae-upgraded.html>
- 6 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/22/us-greece-incomes-idUSBRE99L0I420131022>
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# **II. MAPPING SPACES OF RACIST VIOLENCE**

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# Mapping Spaces of Racist Violence

## Section Opening

by Hara Kouki

**R**acism is on the rise across Europe—and as of late, Greece has been at the centre of attention in this context: the neo-nazi Golden Dawn entered the country's parliament in the summer of 2012; by now, incidents of racist violence are no-news, particularly in Athens. Many have tried to explain how this racist turn may have happened, over such a short period of time and who may be to blame for it: the crisis and its ensuing feelings of despair have been suggested by way of an explanation; the seeking of scapegoats by a nation already self-defined in an introvert way; neoliberal policies of exploitation and exclusion, and so on. This panel adopts a different approach, choosing to focus on attempts to map out, rather than interpret this outburst of racist violence. Such mapping is not itself devoid of interpretations or meanings, to the contrary: it constructs the victims, the perpetrators, the causes and potential remedies to racism alike.

Dimitris Christopoulos notes that until last year, no official data nor any system existed that would record racist crimes—while no single perpetrator of any violent racist attack had ever been convicted by the Greek state. Police's refusal to acknowledge the existence of racist crimes, let alone to investigate them, testifies to the legitimization and internalization of racist motives by the police force. The xenophobic tone in the country is therefore set not by any extreme or external agents, but by the government itself.

The crisis-scape collective on the other hand believes that the way migrants are represented in the country—whether as criminals or victim—leaves no space for another imagining of how we could relate with the 'other'. The *crisis-scape* project sought alternative ways to map violent attacks in Greece—primarily in Athens—by making information openly available and also providing a tool for the creation of networks of action that depart from solidarity, not pity.

Sarah Green concludes the panel by introducing a different reading of the movement of people within the city: think of transient visitors in Athens during the early 1960s or the huge numbers of refugees back in the 1920s. Through her historical comparisons, our current 'exceptional' experiences emerge as a part of a long history of a transnational place. What is different is that under neoliberalism, these movements of people are no longer organized, nor controlled. State borders acquire new meanings, separations and relations change forms, different places and people become knotted together.

Having acknowledged the complicated ways in which state power is entangled with racist violence we could—is the suggestion put forward by this panel—move to mappings of spaces that allow us to better understand our lived experiences in the city, and to relate differently with those who live beside us.



## 6

### “Very Unhappy to Say That to Some Point It’s True”<sup>1</sup>: Fascist Intrusion Within Greek Police

by Dimitris Christopoulos

In January 2013, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, following a week-long visit in Greece and before publishing his report on the country, stated: “I am deeply concerned with the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of racist attacks in Greece. Very few have been led to justice and even fewer have been condemned... The police does not do its job as it should: abuse of authority, excessive use of force, collaboration with Golden Dawn. Among police officers, there are undoubtedly ‘rotten apples’, but they suffer no consequences—impunity here as well... The international image of Greece, and particularly of the judicial system, is in danger. We wish to witness the indictment of members of Golden Dawn and police officers. Until this happens, anything else is mere words”!

Finally published in April 2013, the Muižnieks Report<sup>2</sup> is an unprecedented blow for Greece, bringing the issue of racist violence and police impunity to the fore. Its formulations are anything other than discreet. The Commissioner “regrets that rhetoric stigmatizing migrants has often been used in Greek politics, including by high-level politicians”, and explicitly mentions the prime minister, who in November 2012 spoke before his party’s parliamentary

fraction of “an on-going ‘recuperation’ by the Greek authorities of city centres from irregular migrants who had ‘occupied’ them and subjected them to their ‘illegal activities’” (para. 23). The report mentions similar statements by the political superior of the Hellenic Police, the minister of public order, who said: “the country perishes. Ever since the Dorians’ invasion 4 000 years ago, never before has the country been subjected to an invasion of these dimensions... This is a bomb on the foundations of the society and the State” (para. 24). The reply of the Greek government to the commissioner’s report is of equal interest. Having acknowledged that Golden Dawn is “an expression of popular disillusion and protest against harsh, though necessary, austerity measures”, it admonishes the commissioner that “the solutions cannot be a product of sentimental reactions that could prove unproductive”, and happily concludes that “despite its shortcomings, our country is moving in the right direction”<sup>3</sup>.

If one wishes to talk responsibly about ultra-right and racist violence tolerated by or—worse—actively abetted by the Hellenic Police, then it is highly important to underline what many democratic police officers told us during our research: that in the last instance the tone is not set by Golden Dawn, but first and foremost by the government itself. After all, “the Dorians’ invasion” as a metaphor for immigration was not (only) used by the leader of Golden Dawn, but (also) by the minister responsible for the police. This is a message that straightforwardly legitimizes racist violence, and at the same time totally represses the racist motive as a possible motive of criminal acts. To highlight an issue as a political priority, as has been done with immigration in Greece the last few years—and most certainly so by the current government—gives fuel to arbitrary practices by police and, of course, serves to incubate ultra-right political ideology; in its national socialist version, no less.

Thus, to talk about the ultra-right within the Hellenic Police is necessarily to talk about how the ultra-right keeps hostage the political right wing itself, at the level of its political leadership. This is crucial. To put it simply, if the message sent by the political authorities was not to “recuperate”, surely the Hellenic Police would deal in a wholly different manner with the all-too real “recuperation” carried out by members of Golden Dawn who beat or even murder immigrants on the streets of Athens. Yet while racist attacks climaxed between the two 2012 elections, the arrests or detentions of the perpetrators by the Hellenic Police were virtually non-existent: nobody was arrested<sup>4</sup>. However, the groups that carried out these attacks were not the abstract Greek voters of Golden Dawn, and not even Greek racists in general, but a hard core of a few hundred criminals. For this very reason the police inaction was all the more blatant. In retrospect, the ease with which the dismantlement of the



organization by this self-same Hellenic Police began in the autumn of 2013 only highlights the enormity of the earlier idleness.

Most of the racist attacks (which for now have virtually stopped, though they are likely to resume in the future) were carried out at night by groups of young people wearing Golden Dawn t-shirts assaulting people who appeared to be immigrants. These attacks often included theft. A wallet, a mobile phone or even a few euros carried by the victims are the perfect trophy from the “invader” and, of course, a convenient expropriation of others’ possessions. As testified in documentations by organizations that systematically record racist crime, the detection of such criminal acts usually stumbles upon a dual unwillingness: police unwillingness to investigate the criminal act itself, as the immigrant is not considered to be a credible source of information; and the unwillingness of the immigrant, who usually lives in Greece without papers, to file a complaint for the incident, because he or she is afraid that he or she will be deported. (This second type of unwillingness must be noted although it is beyond the scope of the present study).

The Hellenic Police’s unwavering denial to accept racism as a motive of criminal acts is, first, a “bureaucratic resistance”, a sign of its unwillingness to understand a new reality confronted by all police forces in nations that have become immigrant destinations. Yet there is more to it than that. To not accept racism as a motive and at the same time prevent victims from taking legal action (as is well documented by now) is a direct sign of an official subculture of acquiescence, tolerance and even internalization of racist motives. The “involvement of uniformed and State officers in the attacks” constitutes a special category in the 2012 Annual Report of the Racist Violence Recording Network<sup>5</sup>, which finds an explicit “connection between racist violence and police violence”. In early 2013, the Departments and Offices Against Racist Violence were put to work inside the Hellenic Police. Now, any Greek or foreign citizen can report racist attacks by calling 11414. The creation of this service is certainly laudable. However, neither the (ostensible) education of its members nor its (randomly recruited) staff promise any spectacular results. With an institutional framework that by definition does not secure any protection either for witnesses or victims of such incidents other than their expulsion, many of our interviewees sense that this office mainly responds to the needs of good publicity, rather than to any honest attempt at persecuting racist crime, which, by the way, is still denied as such by the Hellenic Police. And, naturally, the reason for this denial is not that such a crime does not exist, but that a large part of the Hellenic Police approves its motives.

## Endnotes

- 1 Response by the Greek minister of health, A. Georgiades when he was asked by BBC if there are links between the police and Golden Dawn.
- 2 Cf. <https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2275537&SecMode=1&DocId=2004246&Usage=2>
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- 4 Perhaps the only exception has been the arrest of the murderers of a Pakistani man in January 2013, thanks to the testimony of a taxi driver.
- 5 See <http://www.unhcr.gr/1againstracism/11940/>

## 7

### Strange Encounters

by Crisis-scape

**M**ap.crisis-scape.net is an online map of racist attacks with a focus on Athens, but also including incidents from the rest of Greece. The map was launched in the spring of 2013 and was created using Ushahidi, an open source content management system. It allows for anyone to submit an incident of racist attacks by adding the location, type and time of the attack, as well as additional information. Once submitted, each incident is then verified—to the extent possible—by the crisis-scape research team, by seeking additional sources, before it is made public. Incidents can be added anonymously; only an email address is required, in order to clarify any details.

A map of racist attacks could easily be read as another kind of a victimisation project, another representation of the suffering of migrants who attempt to enter Europe. This was one of the considerations when starting the map.crisis-scape.net project. Since the financial crisis hit Greece, some excellent independent blogs and sites as well as national and international media have been reporting stories on the rise of neo-fascism in the country<sup>1</sup>, the construction of new concentration camps<sup>2</sup>, mass arrests of migrants<sup>3</sup>, systematic violence by Golden Dawn and the police<sup>4</sup>, attacks by employers<sup>5</sup> and exploitation by the agricultural sector<sup>6</sup>. Not wishing to reproduce these stories and add to the already large stream of information on this topic, the intention of the map has been to attempt a different type of representation of a situation that is at the same time over-represented and yet invisible. The visibility of the migrant is exactly what makes that person the target of mass arrests, just like in the Xenios Zeus operations. This visibility is also what makes it possible to criminalise an entire group, but, equally, that an entire group is victimised.

Each individual story of suffering becomes also a story of the defined group, but somehow, rather than producing a clearer understanding of the experience and of the conditions that give rise to this situation, these representations usually present us with two interpretation options: the migrant is either a victim or criminal; every new incident and new story can then only verify one or the other.

A major critique of victimisation is therefore that it denies agency, turning a human being or a group of people into passive victims. But a far more important problem is that it obfuscates the political causes of a situation. Over the easter holidays this year, a delegation of police officers, led by the General Inspector of Immigration and Border Protection, visited the section of Amygdaleza concentration camp where minors are being held<sup>7</sup>. They brought with them boardgames, sweets and candy. It was reported that the minors held at the concentration camp offered them gifts in return: traditional easter candles that they had made themselves as part of “creative activities” they undertook at the camp—their products being additionally being offered for free, “pro-bono”, to a set of organisations and institutions. This strange encounter, where agents responsible for the capturing and incarceration of migrants engage in an act of reciprocal generosity with these very same people—minors held behind fences and barb-wire—somehow presents these actors as absolved from responsibility. Incarceration is represented as a natural condition for migrants, mass arrests are entirely normalised—a normalisation of suffering that extends across forms of representation to include even critical representation: The process of victimisation creates a strange of identification where the refugee and the migrant is associated with “a person who suffers”. A set of expectations about their behaviour as victims emerges, where is cooperation is assumed and enforced, and thankfulness for any charity actively produced, through for example these encounters.

The image associated with this easter article was of a group of young men behind several layers of barbed wired fences. The imprisonment of these men and minors at Amygdaleza was neither questioned nor discussed in the article; it was assumed to be inevitable, despite a history of continuous resistance from those inside over the past years. Amygdaleza has been an infamous concentration camp ever since its construction in 2012. Resembling a high security prison, the camp has seen repeated breakout attempts, hunger strikes and riots<sup>8</sup> against the conditions inside and against the fact that people are detained at the concentration camp for up to 18 months while awaiting deportation or rulings on their cases. Incarcerated and yet receiving gifts from the greek police, the minors are at one and the same time represented as both victims and criminals.

The intention with the map is to insist that there is nothing normal about this situation. By inviting anyone to submit a report to the map, the aim is to contribute to the development of a network of solidarity that refuses the simultaneous criminalisation and victimisation of migration, since both these categories lead to the outright characterisation of a category of migrants in its entirety. Criminal or victim, both representations feed into current dominant discourses of detention and of the supposed necessity of concentration camps.

The gathering and verification of data is a big challenge through, and even the broader network of NGOs of the Racist Violence Recording Network has faced difficulties in so doing—including lack of cooperation or outright hindrance by the police; the fact that many migrants are afraid of giving information because of their immigration status, or unwilling due to skepticism of whether it will improve their immediate situation; that the NGOs gathering the data are underfunded and overworked and the recording is an additional task that they do not always have the time nor capacity to carry; that the data is geographically biased, as it is dependent on the areas where the NGOs operate; and finally, that it can be tricky to prove that an attack is racially motivated when there are neither police records of racist violence nor court records, since hardly any cases make it that far. Yet the intention of the map is neither to arrive at exact numbers nor to engage in government advocacy—but rather, to provide a tool for networks of solidarity and action, and to make information openly available and accessible all over. For this reason, it is less important for each incident to be proven beyond doubt. The map therefore distinguishes between, but still carries information submitted by individuals, eye-witnesses, corporate and independent media—in many instances including incidents that are not fully verified.

It is important to understand that while it is visually quantitative and cumulative, the map does not aim for ultimate completeness on the data front. Instead of claiming to know exact numbers, exact locations and the extent of what is taking place, the intention is to act as a continuous record, gathering incidents in one place and in a visual format that can be understood and read by anyone, in a matter of seconds. Starting from the assumption, then, that fully comprehensive verified data will not be quite possible, the map's main contribution is to provide a place to submit an incident, to have it publicly recorded and without putting oneself in danger. Its aim, then, is to provide an ongoing record and reference point to spread real-time information about attacks, their location and severity, preventing these from being lost in the continuous flow of news stories and information. Fundamentally, the map aims to be a vehicle and tool for solidarity and action, rather than the production of pity or gratitude.

## Endnotes

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5 One of the worst known cases of an attack by an employer is the story of Walid, an Egyptian worker on the island of Salamina: Radio Bubble 2012 Home Page. (<http://international.radiobubble.gr/2012/11/walid-story.html>) Accessed 28 April 2012.

6 Cf. New Statesman 2013 Home Page. "Greece's modern slavery: Lessons from Manolada". (<http://www.newstatesman.com/austerity-and-its-discontents/2013/04/greeces-modern-slavery-lessons-manolada>) Accessed 28 April 2014 and X-pressed 2013 Home Page. "Boycott the strawberries of Manolada Greece". ([http://www.x-pressed.org/?xpd\\_article=boycott-the-strawberries-of-manolada-greece](http://www.x-pressed.org/?xpd_article=boycott-the-strawberries-of-manolada-greece)) Accessed 28th of April 2014 and Infomobile 2013 Home Page. "Manolada: Migrant workers shot because they demanded their salaries". (<http://infomobile.w2eu.net/2013/04/17/manolada-migrant-workers-shot-because-they-demanded-their-salaries/>) Accessed 28 April 2014.

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## 8

### Migration Knots: Crisis Within a Crisis

by Sarah Green

**A**thens, 1963. A vibrant city, cosmopolitan city, a city full of tensions, rumblings of revolution, or at least a sense that people were beginning to have enough of the right-wing rulers who had been pushed into government by the powers that be in the 1950s—by the USA mostly, which was following the Truman Doctrine, trying to ensure strong, conservative government to prevent the communists getting in (Clogg 1986: 137-140). But it was not only the Americans; others had an interest in Greece, whether that interest was based on romantic ideals, cold war ideologies, or *realpolitik*. It was an edgy space in 1963, one that had been built, in its modernist guise, on a tangle of partly contradictory, and thoroughly cosmopolitan, aims and ambitions. Bastéa (Bastea 2000) says the core architecture of Athens built during the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflects a mixture of transnational and nationalist ideals of what Greece and the Greeks should be, and it would be interesting to ask, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the midst of crisis, whether those ideals were ever realised in any meaningful sense. Yalouri, who closely studied the variety of uses to which the Acropolis has been put, both symbolically and otherwise, also noted the strongly transnational influence on Athens, from the moment of Greek independence right up to the present day (Yalouri 2001). Many others have said the same about the whole country. Athens is a transnational city *par excellence*—which is to say that transnational political interests have had exceptional levels of involvement in the way the Greek state has developed over the decades. That holds today as well, but the way in which that involvement, or interference some might say, has manifested itself, is rather different now. But I am getting ahead of myself.

I arrived in Athens in 1963 at the age of two, with my English family: father, mother and two older brothers. There were many foreigners like us there at the time: people who somehow felt a little uncomfortable in their own country, whether for social, political, economic or legal reasons. Such people often found their way to Athens. It was not an easy city, but it was easy enough to exist there as a foreigner without too many questions being asked. Athenians were used to foreigners, transients who came and went, and who lived mysterious lives doing who knows what. Nobody much cared, really. Certainly not the police or any government types.

Even during the military regime of 1967-74, there was not much interest in these transient migrants, the people passing through, or even settling in, for a time. That included the poor migrants as well as the more wealthy and highly educated political refugees and ex-patriots (note that wealthier migrants are usually called ex-patriots). The Greek authorities owed nothing to these foreigners, who knew better than to expect anything from the Greek state in any case; the foreigners in those days were really a matter of indifference in all senses of the word. So long as they were not committing crimes, and in particular, selling drugs or getting up to any other kind of behaviour defined as troublesome by the Greek police, foreigners were allowed to just exist in Athens, and do what they liked. That is not what the law said, of course; it is not what the bureaucratic system required, either; but it's how people lived. It was even relatively easy to live without the right visas and other paperwork. So long as you did not get in the way of anybody powerful, life went on.

My family first stayed in Piraeus in 1963, for a few months before we moved to the island of Lesbos for several years. Piraeus, as Renée Hirschon richly reported in her ethnography, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*—a book title that may well be needed again for another population of Greeks in the coming years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—was one amongst many areas in and around Athens that had experienced a huge influx of refugees from the Asia Minor crisis in the 1920s (Hirschon 1989). *Prosfiges*. That was the period when the Greek word for 'refugees' began to carry particular weight and significance in the country. As Hirschon records on the first page of her ethnography, land was put aside for these refugees in the outskirts of Athens and in Piraeus. These people were officially defined as 'coming home', in a sense: Greek Orthodox peoples sent to Greece when the Ottoman empire, their former home, ceased to exist, as a place. But as Hirschon also records, Greece felt foreign to the newcomers, and they confronted significant levels of prejudice. This was not for the first time, of course: Bastéa reminds us (Bastéa 2000: 21), as do both James Faubion and Michael Herzfeld in different ways (Herzfeld 1986; Faubion 1993), that



in the early period of the Greek state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were heated disagreements about who counted as a Greek and who did not, which was based as much on how recently people had migrated to Greece, and what part they played in the war of Independence, as it did on any concepts of blood or soil. The 1920s arrivals were something of a repetition, then, of migrants who are, to a greater or lesser degree, Greeks.

That 1920s period marked two things about the relation between Athens and migrants. The first is that it established a material, embodied link between the city and other parts of the world, as well as between the city and transnational organizations such as the League of Nations, which oversaw the compulsory movement of populations between Turkey and Greece (Hirschon 2003). And second, it established a social context in which strangers arrived in the city in very large numbers, all at once. The sheer quantity of people was a major characteristic of the migration during that period. Much the same is also true today: a perception of the sheer numbers of the new arrivals to Athens, particularly of people who have no safe place to go, has taken many people's breath away.

Of course, a crucial difference between the 1920s mass migration and the current period is that in the 1920s, the influx of population was carried out by transnational agencies as an official policy agreed within the Lausanne Convention of 1923, which had the explicit aim of exchanging large portions of Orthodox and Muslim populations between the new Greek and Turkish territories. In the current period, there are no coordinated transnational policies that are intended to move populations from one place to another. Rather, there is a post-Bretton Woods chaotic scramble for resources and power, an ongoing battle, just about everywhere in the world. Some people call that chaos the outcome and clear logic of neoliberalism (and in anthropology, Chris Gregory and David Graeber are two of the better known ones who call it that) (Graeber 2011; Gregory 1997). This neoliberal, no holds barred, scramble for resources has created multiple regions in the world where life has become so harsh, either because of ongoing violent conflicts or because of extreme lack of resources or opportunities, that people are driven out to look for something else, some way to survive. Many of them head for Europe. And as an outcome of a range of border control programs deployed in recent years around the outer edges of the European Union, the vast majority of undocumented people trying to enter the EU from these troubled places have been trying to enter through Greece over the last five or six years. The majority of those people end up in Athens, one way or another, at least for a time. As in the 1920s, the sheer numbers of migrants has made it feel like a crisis, piled up on top of the financial crisis. And

the media helps to encourage that sense, reporting it as a crisis within a crisis. The European Union has made the migration crisis worse in Greece, many say, through its Dublin II Agreement, which requires undocumented migrants to be returned to the country of first entry into the EU.

Unsurprisingly then, the majority of the Greek border police have been deployed in Athens in recent years, for that is where the migrants are. It is not really possible to fully patrol the borders at the edges of the territory, neither in the Evros region in the northern mainland, nor the multiple areas of access to Greek territory by the sea. Even with the additional work of Frontex, that EU-commissioned border security organization which carries out various operations at the edges of the EU's territories, huge numbers of undocumented travellers still make it onto Greek territory. In truth, most of them do not think of it as Greek territory, but as EU territory. That does not matter to the people in the Greek population who regard the issue as an 'invasion' of foreigners on their national land, but it does matter in understanding what kind of border work is being done in trying to manage this influx of people: it involves the management of a transnational border (an EU border) that has had pressure put upon it by peoples driven out of their own places by the chaos created by a political economy that has little respect for borders of any kind—political, social, environmental, economic. In any case, both for political and pragmatic reasons, the border police have to be in Athens, and have to look like they are *doing* something.

It was different in Athens a few years ago, in 2008, just before the financial crisis changed things dramatically. In Syntagma square in August 2008, the police were the ones who dealt with the undocumented migrants. They were dressed like police as well, rather than dressing like armed military, and there were not very many of them. The illegal traders would put out their stalls to sell their goods—handbags, umbrellas, children's toys, cigarette lighters, household crockery and cutlery, all kinds of things. And the Athenians would browse these stalls, looking to see if there was anything interesting in amongst all these things that were made in China and arrived into the hands of the migrants, who were not from China, by mysterious routes. Then the police would arrive, the traders would pack up within 20 seconds and run away at high speed. When the police were gone, the traders would come back, and the whole thing would be repeated again in a little while when the police patrol returned.

That's how it was just five years ago. It's hard to remember Syntagma square in that way now. Omonia was a little harsher, there were already quite a few tensions developing there, and in Exarheia too. But the harshness with which the border police now deal with the issue is something else again: an

order of magnitude different from the earlier period to such a degree that it has become a different kind of phenomenon. The cat-and-mouse game of 2008 allowed a mutual recognition that everyone involved had a job to do. The dynamic in more recent years seems to be based on no recognition at all: the perceived sheer scale of the problem has made it impossible, it seems, to see any of the people involved in it as *people*. They are migrants or they are border guards, and neither category appears to recognize the other one as anything other than a category.

Everyone knows it is not only the borders guards who are confronting the more recent migrants. Members of Golden Dawn are out on patrol regularly, wearing their uniforms that echo and borrow from the military style of past dictatorships. They go out in order to defend Greece and the Greeks, they say; they go out in order to 'sort out' the migrants, as an act of patriotism. Except for their tendency to valorize violence, they remind me of Harel Shapira's account of the Minutemen of Arizona, in his book, *Waiting for José* (Shapira 2013). The Minutemen (named after the men who needed to be ready in a minute to defend America in the earlier period of that country's history) are patrolling the US-Mexican border on behalf of their country, they say. The Minutemen (some of whom are actually women) are unpaid, unofficial, and their aim is to stop migrants from crossing into the United States. Shapira points out in his ethnography that many of the Minutemen are much like the rest of the population in their political and social views; the difference is not nearly as sharp as some of us would like to believe. A similar point was made by Douglas Holmes about the growth of the far right in Europe, in his book, *Integral Europe* (Holmes 2000). The reasons that the police, border guards and general population end up being harshly prejudiced against people who have left deeply troubled parts of the world and come to Europe in search of something better, is not a straightforward matter. It is full of moral, social, economic, and political knots and tangles that makes it actually quite difficult to disentangle from ourselves, to keep ourselves separate from it. Edward Said suggested a long time ago (in *Orientalism*) (Said 1991) that many ideologies have a tendency to avoid confronting the negative, dark, side of ourselves by ascribing those characteristics to others, to the ones we can legitimately condemn for being in some way lacking—usually morally, but perhaps in other ways as well—for example, having some deficiencies in modernity or education. Of course, the ignorance of prejudice and bigotry must be challenged whenever and wherever possible; but there is an equal responsibility to examine whether elements of that ignorance and prejudice reappear in the *way* that the bigotry is challenged. It's a knotty issue.

Besides the battles going on in the streets and in the 'no-go' areas of Athens, the areas that 'decent people' would never go, there are also other places where the migrants can be found, behind closed doors and away from the gaze of the heavily armed border guards. For example, there are care workers of all kinds working in the homes of the people who possess more money than time. Those migrants are protected by their patrons, some say; others say they are something between prisoners and slaves, having replaced their own family and home for somebody else's, in the hopes of sending money back and making things better for the next generation. Those people might get out on a Sunday afternoon, to breath a little in the park, but not always. They are an invisible small army, keeping things going in Athens, despite everything else falling to pieces. In focusing on what happens in the streets between border guards and migrants, the less eye-catching aspects should not be forgotten.

### Concluding remarks

There are three main points about this situation with migrants in Athens that this short intervention is trying to make.

First: it is not the first time there has been the sudden arrival of large numbers of people from elsewhere in this city. Deeper historical comparisons would be worth making. Both in the past and in the present, particular forms of relations and separations with other parts of the world are as important in understand what is going on with migration in Athens as studying the events in Athens itself.

Second: one distinctive aspect of the migration on this occasion is that it is part of a particular form of political economy, which some call neoliberalism, that is nowhere near as focused or organized in its movement of populations from one place to another as previous political and economic interventions have been.

Third: the scale of the arrival of migrants in Athens is a key element of the current perception of it as a 'crisis'. This has also changed the nature of the border guards' response, as well as increasing its scale.

Finally: the implication of all of this is that the borders being both crossed and policed in this situation are different in quality from the 20<sup>th</sup> century model of state borders for quite some time. In particular, it is one example of how different parts of the world are entangled with one another (knotted, meshed) rather than being separate entities that are interrelated.

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**III.**

**BETWEEN  
INVISIBILITY AND  
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# Between Invisibility and Precarity

## Section Opening

by Christos Filippidis

**B**y learning how to live in the spaces and at the times of crisis, we also learn how to communicate about it in specific ways. All sorts of discourses around the crisis and its idioms are being produced today; discourses that not only impose contents, but also point at forms of thought around its causes and its overcoming alike. Forms allured by mega-narratives—which rush to draw the limits of acceptable meaning-assignment. Within an environment that controls the terms of any question-setting, the invention of forms and contents which aim, for this reason, to focus elsewhere, is rendered even more challenging and demanding. Nevertheless this change of focus, as Dina Vaiou points out, *does not mean amplification or diminution of the subject itself; it means a change of view about it.* And the present section attempts to open up space to thoughts on this precise shift.

Having already undergone some years of tough readjustment, it slowly becomes evident that the crisis can nowadays be seen not as some violent interruption, but as a structural component of (neo)liberal governmentality; as part, in other words, of a political and economic rationality able—as Akis Gavriilidis assures us—to capitalise on ostensible ruptures and discontinuities. A rationality that comprises, according to Giorgos Tsimouris, a particular interweaving of *representations* and *interventions*. In the case of the Greek particularity, the crisis and its management are constituted as a framework of mainstream discourses and as a plexus of power relations on the basis of some urgency that nevertheless acquires elements of permanence. And so, in this state of permanent emergency formed by the still-relentless crisis, policies of (neo)liberal governance take much more aggressive forms; forms that are normalised, to a great extent, signifying a structural shift in terms of processes of subjectification.

At the margins of the “big pictures” put together by the obscure macro-economic discourses, an everyday framework is constituted that intensifies class, gendered and racial divisions—and which exacerbates the conditions of precarity, rendering entire populations vulnerable. As Athina Athanasiou suggests, the contemporary techniques of neoliberal governing—as crisis management techniques—*bring forth the ways in which subjects are interpellated into crisis politics as subjects of vulnerability and precariousness.* In the everydayness of urban space, indications of the crisis are articulated more explicitly through forms of life and embodied subjects that gradually sink into obscurity and are sentenced to exclusion. It therefore becomes clear that the comprehension of the idioms of the crisis and its city can only be attained through a discussion around visibility; around the visibility of the power relations that rearrange meanings, the visibility of the vulnerable embodied subjects and the tangible visibility of their resistance.



## 9

# Laissez Faire, Security, and Liberalism: Revisiting December 2008

by Akis Gavriilidis

In December 2008, Athens became world news for the first time in recent years, for a reason that was soon overshadowed by the financial and debt crisis that came immediately after. I think it would be useful to revisit this event now, when it is not so loaded any more in terms of public attention and affect.

This reason was a totally unpredicted, contingent event: the pointless murder of a youngster by a policeman, which sparked a wave of massive and angry protests for several days in Athens—including in neighbourhoods where no demonstrations had ever taken place in living memory—as well as in all major Greek cities, and several minor ones. These consisted in mass rallies, mainly by equally young people with no previous experience in social protest, occupation of public buildings, “sieges” of police stations, but also considerable damage on private property and some looting of shops by the demonstrators and/ or others. The difficulty to tell a demonstrator from an “other” was precisely an important part of the whole picture, as no political or other body or organisation had made any official call for these protests. But this does *not* mean they were “spontaneous” in the usually pejorative sense that this term has in the left-wing tradition; many of these actions displayed a high degree of efficiency, accurate coordination, and organisational skills. But they were prepared, and performed, by a subject-non subject; a subject that did not pre-exist, it came to being through this very action, only to dissipate and vanish afterwards. This dissipation was not the mark of a lack or a failure, but rather

formed a constitutive part of the mobilisations from their inception. This punctual and circumstantial existence was their only possible form of existence. What I would like to focus on, though, is a specific aspect concerning the response—or lack of it—by the Greek state to these events.

In the beginning, the state-controlled (or -affiliated) mass media tried to conceal, or misrepresent/ downplay, the event. Soon, as this became impossible due to the circulation of the news through the social media, government officials, including the Public Order minister and then the Prime Minister Karamanlis, tried to appease protests by showing their “understanding” and promising that the perpetrators would be arrested and justice would be administered. (Which, incidentally, was indeed the case eventually: the killer was condemned to life imprisonment, two years later). Almost most importantly, the Chairman of the Piraeus Chamber of Commerce, when asked by a journalist what he was thinking about the lootings and whether these would have a catastrophic impact on the market, replied that “human life is more important than commercial goods”.

Of course, what contributed to such magnanimous stance was possibly the tactics that the Karamanlis government opted for: they instructed the police not to use excessive force or try to totally clampdown the protests, or even prevent lootings, and they subsequently compensated shop holders with state budget funds for all the damages they had suffered.

This is a typical liberal tactics. Possibly, it is a liberal-Western “reading” of a typical Eastern and, more particularly, Chinese idea. It is useful to remember here that François Quesnay, the leading figure of the Physiocrats, was also called “the Confucius of Europe” in his time.

“Laissez-faire” [Let people do], in the first place, was not specifically a motto in favour of free market or private entrepreneurship as opposed to the state’s economic activity, but concerned in general the way the state should react to crises in order to ensure security.

In this respect, we could refer to some remarks on this notion by Giorgio Agamben (who explicitly invokes Foucault’s analyses on the birth of liberalism):

If we take the concept of security, which is so much talked about today and which is almost the slogan of Western governments, this is a term derived from the concept of state of exception: security is “public salvation”. But here, Michel Foucault showed very nice which is the origin of this concept: he showed in his lectures that security as a technique of governance was introduced by the physiocrats on the eve of the French Revolution. What was the problem of the time? It was famines; how to avoid the occurrence of famine. Until then,

people had never thought in this way; they collected cereal beforehand, etc. The physiocrats had this perhaps ingenious idea: we will no longer seek to avoid famines. We will let them happen, but then we will be ready to govern them, to orient, to ensure they go towards a right direction.

The basic idea [of Western governments] is rather “we will let disasters, riots, happen, or even we will help them happen, because this will allow us to intervene and govern them towards the right direction”. For example, American politics for twenty years is clearly this: it never prevents the appearance of disorder, destruction, instead it helps to produce them, but afterwards tries to benefit from them in order to direct them towards “security”.

We need to bear this in mind: governments today do not aim at maintaining order, but at managing disorder.

(Giorgio Agamben, interview—in French—to the Greek TV channel ET3; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lpRltPG2AY>, my translation)

In this sense, the Greek state reacted to this contingent and unpredictable crisis by first letting people do, and subsequently trying to turn their doing in its favour, to capitalise on the movement and the exodus of people.

I think it would be useful to ask oneself whether this is a general pattern of the action of states during the last decades, and even earlier, and, if this is the case, to what extent this leads us to reconsider the relationship between the political and the economic.

According to a conventional view, shared or used even by some of its proponents, neoliberalism consists in “less state” (it being usually understood mainly as “less state intervention in the economy”). This, in turn, gave rise to a whole series of criticisms that try to reveal the hypocrisy of neoliberalism, in so far as it limits itself to the “economy” and does not extend this “reduction” of the state to the police and the repressive apparatuses as well.

The example of the Greek December 2008 does not seem to confirm this simplistic dichotomy.

The tactics of the Greek state as regards shop lootings, described above, does not exactly consist in “less state”. The state is not a substance, whose presence can be increased or decreased at will. It is a relationship, an action upon actions. Which means it can occasionally consist in a *withdrawal*, and/ or a redeployment of these forces; a de-territorialisation and reterritorialisation. But, in this example, both the “political” and the “economic” are present in each of the two spaces (the one from which state forces withdrew from, and the one

they moved to). Karamanlis did not abandon an “economic” space in order to move to a “repressive” one (or vice versa); he undertook certain actions in view of a specific assemblage, a situation combining elements of both “politics” and “economy”—and, of course, language, communication, and affect, which are elements crucial for both of these domains. He did not only make a decision settling a private debt, but also a gesture admitting the existence of a *public* one. By compensating merchants for damages that it did not (directly/ visibly) induced, the Greek state was making an oblique statement that it recognized its responsibility for the murder of Grigoropoulos, giving a “coded message” to appease protesters, *and*, at the same time, with the same move, was trying to use the force and the action of the protesters, and the fear it could create to the “forces of the market”, in order to “re-launch the economy”, to reassure the small-and-medium enterprise holders that it cares about them and won’t let them down.

In addition to the above, it would be also useful to reflect on the action—or lack of it—from the part of the people themselves on the basis of this example.

In the leftwing-antiauthoritarian tradition, (and in Greece even more so), the fact that power is able to manage the people’s affect, communication, movement, and exodus, was always a source of embarrassment, deep concern, even despair; and then, at a second level, a source of mutual accusations and contests between radical political groups on who is the most radical. Any capture of a popular mobilisation by capital and state is universally read as evidence that this mobilisation was “not the real thing”; it was insufficient, not well prepared, with a low level of revolutionary theory or organisation, its leaders were petty-bourgeois, if not outright traitors who sold off, so we have to draw our lessons and next time try to do better.

This is the horror of “co-optation”, for which in Greek anti-establishment parlance we use the much abhorred term “ενσωμάτωση”, (literally “incorporation”), which marks the irrevocable defeat and extinction of any contestation and any anti-systemicity, using the metaphor of *recipients* where bodies are enclosed successfully in their totality without any traces, without rests.

Such accusations were indeed voiced by certain groups from the left, but even from conservative mainstream journalists and commentators, against the December protests, and were repeated even more strongly for the case of the “Aganaktismenoi” [The Indignant Ones] protesting at Syntagma square a couple of years later, and also for the Occupy movement, the Arab springs, etc. Either with disappointment or with malignant irony, modernists were very eloquent

in enumerating the lacks of such primitive, naïve and irrational manifestations of the multitude which had no clear political goals and no hierarchy of priorities or set of concrete demands.

The point I want to suggest is that this apparently anecdotal, fragmentary, non-strategic character of the movements of the multitude is not an accidental lack or an imperfection that could or should be “corrected”. It is here to stay; it probably was always here. There will always be something lacking, and there will never be a perfectly organised, comprehensive action of the masses that will take hold of the state and definitely redress all its wrongdoings.

Approaching the movement of people as de-territorialisation could be a useful antidote to the paralysing despair and low self-esteem caused by the fear of “ensomàtosi”. Precisely this perceived lack is at the same time the reason why “incorporation” is never perfect: in the same way, there is always something left out of the recipient, something exceeding, or missing, or both; and this discrepancy is what makes new actions possible.

## 10

# Governing For the Market: Emergencies and Emergences in Power and Subjectivity

by Athena Athanasiou

### States of crisis

**T**he state of crisis as a mode of neoliberal governmentality raises difficult questions about the links between precariousness and action, shame and solidarity, dispossession and intimacy. More specifically, it compels a consideration of how precariousness might shape political action, how a sense of shame might (or might not) trigger practices of solidarity, and how dispossession might (or might not) become the occasion for re-imagined and re-activated intimacies. Current regimes of neoliberal governing through crisis management bring forth the (economized, but also gendered, sexed, and racialized) subject as a performative political arena of vulnerability and precariousness. They also bring forth the ways in which subjects are interpellated into crisis politics as subjects of vulnerability and precariousness.

In this context of crisis discourse, new configurations of crisis and critique are emerging with reference to questions of what counts as crisis and how critical responses are articulated. In other words, the question of thinking critically in times of crisis emerges and persists. This question(ing) also involves taking into consideration that critique is always already in crisis, as it pertains to interrogating the terms which determine what counts as an ontological claim. Thus, critique is about provoking crisis to established truth claims, including the truth claims of crisis.

In this sense, I suggest that we consider Judith Butler's engagement with Michel Foucault's well-known essay "What is critique?". They both pose the question of critique with reference to forces of subjectivation, self-formation,



and de-subjugation. Foucault writes: "Critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially ensure the de-subjugation [*désassujettissement*] of the subject in the context of what we would call, in a word, the politics of truth."<sup>1</sup> And Judith Butler responds thus: "But if that self-forming is done in disobedience to the principles by which one is formed, then virtue becomes the practice by which the self forms itself in de-subjugation, which is to say that it risks its deformation as a subject, occupying that ontologically insecure position which poses the question anew: who will be a subject here, and what will count as a life, a moment of ethical questioning which requires that we break the habits of judgment in favor of a riskier practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint."<sup>2</sup> To echo Butler's formulation, I would like to argue that what is at stake in current regimes of crisis is precisely a contested domain where subjects "risk their deformation as subjects", "occupy ontologically insecure positions", and, at the same time, "yield artistry from constraint". In this text, I propose to explore current neoliberal governmentality as a distinct assemblage of power, knowledge, and subjectivity.

### Biopolitics and governmentality of crisis

The current regimes of crisis provide the grounds for a critical re-engagement with, and a critical re-imagining of, who counts as part of the public; how the political is performed; how and where it "takes place"; what qualifies as political subjectivity, and how it is gendered, racialized, and classed; how are bodies subjugated and de-subjugated in these times of neoliberal governmentality and precarization?

In light of this questioning, I argue that neoliberalism is not just a mode of capitalist financialization in the strict sense, but rather a more encompassing regime of truth and a more diffuse matrix of social intelligibility, which includes particular modalities of power, subjectivation, governance, self-governance, and self-formation. Such modalities take the interwoven forms of biopolitical (self-) management, self-interested and competitive individualization, securitization, responsabilization, a reconfigured relation between public and private, and a particular logic of economy and the market.

As "crisis" becomes a complex assemblage of power relations which both manage life and expose to death, the "state of exception", which is usually deployed to signify the element of emergency at the heart of the normative administrative discourses of crisis, proves to be not exceptional but rather

ordinary, systematic, canonical, and foundational. The normative terms of subjectivity emerging from such configuration are defined by exclusionary norms of gender, capital, and nation. It is through such (un)exceptional forces of power and subjectivation that crisis becomes the production of life and death as economic and political currency, as an economic and political ontology of life-and-death itself.

In the analytics of biopower developed by Michel Foucault, if sovereignty seeks to rule on death, biopolitics is about administering “life” through managing surplus populations. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault suggests that liberalism is the paradigmatic mode of governmentality for the exercise of biopolitics. Liberal forms of governing, contrary to the police-like political doctrines of *Raison d’État*, entail a limiting of the power of the state. The role of the state and state institutions is to ensure and safeguard the pervasive functions of the market. As Foucault writes: “One must govern for the market, not because of the market” (*Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 121).

In this context, one must account for and critically engage the significant trajectories in Foucault’s method from the introduction of the concept as an aspect of his engagement with the problem of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and, especially, from a more totalizing treatment of biopolitics as a modern configuration of power in *Society Must Be Defended* (1976) to the lectures of 1978 (*Security, Territory, Population*) and 1979 (*Birth of Biopolitics*), where different co-present modes, structures, and techniques of power (i.e., the disciplinary, the juridical, security, population) are presented in their hierarchical correlations, re-articulations and transformations. In *Security, Territory, Population*, biopolitics is interrelated with questions of governmentality (the linking of governing [“gouverner”] and modes of thought [“mentalité”] and what Foucault calls “apparatuses of security”; in fact, biopolitics tends to be analytically displaced by the idea of “governing” and the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed. In this text, Foucault addresses the “pre-eminence over all other types of power—sovereignty, discipline, and so on—of the type of power that we can call ‘government’” (*STP*, p. 108). In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault seems to deploy governmentality to signify power relations in general. In this text, he continues to pursue the theme of a governmental rationality which seeks maximum effectiveness (in mastering life) by governing less, and focuses on a detailed analysis of the forms of this liberal governmentality, including the role of neoliberalism in twentieth century politics.

So in order to deal with the multiplicity of directions in Foucault’s work on biopolitics and his closely connected discussions of governmentality,

it is important to account for the ways in which biopolitics, in the form of a crisis-oriented normalization, gives the ground for today's re-articulation and re-configuration of governmentality. This perspective runs counter to a teleological conceptualization of governmentality as a form of rule which gradually displaces those technologies of power, namely sovereignty and discipline, that are considered archaic, more "repressive", "authoritarian", "irrational, and "uneconomic" than governmental technologies. In this light, neoliberal rationalities and techniques of power involve an articulation between "productive" and "destructive" aspects of power, discipline and freedom, choice and competition, authoritarianism and self-determination, subjectivation and subjection.

Neoliberal governmentality denotes an authoritative apparatus of producing dispensable and disposable populations, and, at the same time, producing and demarcating the normative codes of the human by regulating the (economic) vitality, affectivity, potentiality, embodiment, vulnerability and livability of subjects. Within the purview of this governmentality, the biopolitical imaginary and administration of life and death is reinvented, revitalized, and reconfigured, as resources and vulnerability are differently and unevenly distributed among different bodies—differently economized, racialized, and gendered bodies.

Thus, in the Greek neoliberal context of plurality of power technologies, steep economic disparities and deprivation, the normalization of poverty and the widespread condition of precarity are combined with, and supplemented by, various forms of securitization, such as tightened migration policies, the abjection of undocumented immigrants, as well as an intensified politics of racism, sexism and homophobia. Economic hardship and austerity measures required under the bailout, loss of jobs, pay cuts, disposable labour, unemployment, pension reductions, poverty, evictions, loss of dignity, and the dissolution of the public healthcare system are attended by an overall authoritarianism: emergency legislation is deployed to curtail rights; a citizenship law repeals citizenship rights for second-generation migrants and increases the number of years of residence and schooling that the children of immigrants need to prove before they are eligible to apply for citizenship; governmental invocation of an emergency law and the "threat of civil disorder" forces strikers back to work; the Health Minister targets HIV-positive women as a "public health bomb"; and the police detains trans people in order to "clean and beautify the city".

## Emergency politics, emergent politics

As crisis management turns into a crucial mode of neoliberal governance through a political and moral economy of life itself, at the same time, new radical movements are emerging in different parts of the world as well as different topologies where these movements are being performed. As people are forcefully relegated by the market logic to subjugated subjects and disposable bodies with no rights, new modes of agonistic embodied citizenship have been emerging, through which challenges to neoliberal policies have been posed.

Crisis becomes an arena in which different forms of publicness are enacted and negotiated. As emergent subjectivities, affective communities, and spaces of non-compliance take shape in various multilayered city-scapes of crisis, different forms of civic protest address a range of concerns including austerity, the privatization and corporatization of public space, poverty, precarity, social injustice, and state authoritarianism.

In this sense, as present neoliberal regimes increasingly expose to death, through differential exposure to the injuries of poverty, demoralization, and racism, a performative politics of protest emerges, one which mobilizes the radical potentiality of transforming such injurious interpellations. Assembled bodies in the street, but also in various collectivities and alternative networks of solidarity (often organized in ways alternative to the archetype of the heroic activist), reclaim the unconditionality of public space, demanding a democracy *with* demos, and enacting a demos with differences.

The tension between, on the one side, the differential distribution and regulation of the terms of precariousness as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality and, on the other side, the struggle to reclaim the terms of a livable life without erasing vulnerability is precisely what I would like to call “precarious intensity”. Precarious intensity implies an agonistic (instead of antagonistic) way of attending to vulnerability; an agonistic engagement which often takes place within a contested public space, or within a contested realm of embodying public space.

The state of crisis, where people are (differentially) faced with economic dispossession, the political violence of authoritarianism, and a state of deadly living, has inspired a philosophical critique of neoliberalism based on a theoretical reconsideration of Foucault’s conception of biopolitics, especially its emphasis on making live and letting die. But how might we rethink biopolitics as a performative resource for agonistic political engagement and contestation? How might we think together a politics of emergency and a politics of emergence?<sup>3</sup> And, to further complicate this line of inquiry, how

should we reconsider this question taking into consideration that “emergence” is also one of the administrative, managerial, and affective modes deployed by neoliberal governance?

The figure of the emergent resonates with Jacques Derrida’s notion of *arrivant*, as a disposition to the other, and an openness to what lies outside of oneself. In this regard, it indicates the moment of the possibility of an impossibility: a radical transformation of the social and political (rather than merely economic) ontologies upon which neoliberal governmentality is founded. Taking up such line of investigation would help make us attentive to the manifold, plural, and contradictory ways in which “emergence” might signify and complicate the unexpected, the dissonant, and the subversive; how it could be reclaimed by an aporetic ethics and poetics and thus be activated as a trans-formative critique of the fixed totality and propriety inherent in states of emergency that structure and regulate our present governmentality.

## Endnotes

- 1 Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?” in *The Politics of Truth*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) (1997): 41- 82 (p. 47).
- 2 Judith Butler, “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue” (*Transversal*, 2001).
- 3 Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

## 11

# From Invisibility into the Centre of the Athenian Media Spectacle: Governmentality and Immigration in the Era Of Crisis

by Giorgos Tsimouris

Invisibility of a certain part of the population may be seen as a preliminary stage to scapegoating, which is what happened to immigrants living in the centre of Athens before the crisis. And yet, they were never entirely absent from media or public discourse, as they were regularly portrayed to be *the* problem for the city—a hygienic threat, an non-assimilable and therefore dangerous population, ‘a matter out of place’ at best. Even if these representations were far from unknown before the crisis, they have multiplied, intensified and become more aggressive in the past five years.

My aim in this paper is to explore and to problematise this transformation, which concerns the official representations of immigrants, arguing that the management of immigration during crisis sought to ease, to comfort and to disorient indigenous anxieties and phobias associated with extensive jobs losses and mass income reductions; with anxieties concerning the future of employment and with insecurity instigated by popular media around immigrant criminality in the city centre and in specific neighbourhoods—such as *Aghios Panteleimon*, *Kypseli*, *Patissia* and *Omonoia*.

The classification of immigrants as ‘dangerous classes’, associated with criminality, is a commonly encountered practice of state policies in the history of international immigration. The classification particularly concerns immigrants as newcomers—those who are therefore seen to be inadequately integrated or assimilated. And yet, the ‘dangerous character’ of these classes seems to intensify in face of the shortage of employment opportunities in host societies. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, “[t]he new ‘dangerous classes’... are those recognized as unfit for reintegration and proclaimed to be unassimilable, since no useful function can be conceived for them to perform after ‘rehabilitation’.

*They are not just excessive, but redundant*" (Bauman, 2007:69; emphasis in the original). Their supposed dangerous character is therefore directly connected to their redundancy in a society shaped by neo-liberal perceptions, in which unemployment is seen as some personal inefficiency rather than a structural characteristic of late financial capitalism.

I draw on Foucault's understanding of governmentality, according to which sovereignty does not directly activate mechanisms of power—but instead comprises "a set of actions or possible action... it facilitates something or makes it more difficult". As he explains, the exercise of power lies more in the order of 'governmentality' rather than in direct conflict between two opponents; it primarily concerns the capability "to structure the possible field of the action of others" (Foucault, 1997: 92-93). For Foucault, power motivates, inducts, diverges—it makes something more or less difficult, it broadens or restricts, it makes something more or less probable: "it is an action over other actions" (ibid., 92).

My main point is that from 2009 on, when the consequences of the so-called Greek economic crisis became evident in the Greek society, immigrants were targeted with some renewed force by state institutions and mechanisms alike. By the term *state*, I hereby understand not merely the government and its related constitutional institutions, strictly defined; I adopt, instead, a broad notion of the state that may be summarised as the plexus formed by corporative interests, political institutions and the media.

In his analysis of Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', Thomas Lemke brings to the fore on the one hand specific forms of *representations* and on the other specific forms of *interventions* (Lemke, 2001: 191; emphasis in the original). Representation is inevitably a political act that constructs and creates a certain reality through the use of concepts, images, classifications and contextualisations—it is not merely some realistic reflection of a certain pre-existing reality.

In this respect, hegemonic representations have constructed immigrants—especially the undocumented between them—as some threatening, dangerous and un-assimilable group. While the misrepresentation of immigrants by the dominant media is far from a new story in Greece, in the time of crisis it became systematic and persistent. Images representing the centre of Athens as some deserted land, as a supposed result of high concentration of the immigrant population were projected regularly—and were directly associated with criminality and the insecurity of the indigenous population. The use of the term 'illegal immigrants' was dominant in these accounts, addressing not only those who crossed the borders without being allowed to do so, but also asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied children.

These mental images were coupled by claims against the degradation of the city centre by the ‘invasion of foreigners’ and demands that Greece should no longer remain a ‘fence-less vineyard’, as the Greek saying would have it. Part of the same narrative was the fabricated increase in the number of ‘illegal immigrants’ and the shift in the dominant terms used to speak about them. Conservatives would demand an intensification of police patrols in specific Athenian neighbourhoods and more systematic police action as a whole. These were coupled by media debates featuring policy makers as guests—predominantly from the far-right. It was very rare to see any academics or researchers on migration be included in these debates. A rather common conclusion of these mediatic encounters was the urgency to oust immigrants from the city centre—and to reoccupy public space in the name of its older, indigenous inhabitants, who were supposedly entitled to it, according to this approach.

These acts of representation rationalized and made necessary the intervention of the police in the eyes of a significant part of the population—which had been seeking a scapegoat for its present anxieties and hardships. Let us not forget that for Foucault, the act of exercising power is closely connected to processes of political rationalization and processes of subjectification alike. This media hysteria was therefore followed by some broad and extended operations of the Greek Police that undertook the task to ‘clear up’ and to sanitize the centre of Athens—in the language of their preceding media commentators. Public buildings and abandoned houses occupied by immigrants were evicted, streets and squares were ‘handed back’ to the Greeks, always in that same language. In addition, these official state activities would significantly broaden the space for action and for murderous attacks by Golden Dawn and its neo-Nazi members.

One must also account, in these sanitization crusades, the persecution of immigrant sex workers working in the streets of Athens. In often-repeated media accounts, they have been presented as a ‘health bomb’ in the historic centre of Athens and as a threat to the life and the health of its native residents. Six days before the elections of 2012, some hundreds of women—many among them homeless and drug addicts—were detained all over the centre, as part of so-called police ‘sweeping’ operations, and were forced to undergo HIV health checks. These operations were orchestrated by the then Minister of Health, Andreas Loverdos, who would in several occasions argue in public that his intention had been to protect the ‘Greek family’ from a possible Aids contamination by HIV positive immigrant sex workers.

Out of the great number women who were forced to be checked, only twelve were eventually found to be HIV positive; most of them were homeless and drug addicts—and one of them was under-age. Ten of them were of Greek



origin, one from Russia and one from Bulgaria. Even though the way in which this extensive ‘sweep’ operation took place provoked furious reactions between doctors, lawyers and activists—concerning evident law violations and the human rights of these women alike—the media presented the whole operation as a major success story for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Protection of the Citizen; and a proof of care for the Greek male sex clients and the Greek family alike. The aim of this operation was not, obviously, the medical treatment of these women—but rather, their persecution as criminals and their deportation from the country. It is also important to remember that the Minister of Health, Loverdos, argued on camera that “in order to face these issues we have to close the country’s doors to foreigners”.

With the help of Lemke, we can locate at the core of neo-liberal rationality, “the strategy of rendering individual subjects ‘responsible’... for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc.” as “problem(s) of ‘self-care’ (Lemke, 2001: 9)—instead of the actual consequences of neo-liberal financial policies and structures that lie far beyond the reach or the control of individual subjects.

An inter-cultural approach to the notion of the scapegoat reveals that—despite different myths and understandings of its meaning across societies and cultures—there are certain universal principles underlying its social function from the point of view of governmentality. The scapegoat, an eccentric human being, an animal or a spirit, is charged for the sins, the misery, the anxiety or the epidemics of the community—and because of that, it is expelled from the community, killed or destroyed.

For the purposes of governmentality, undocumented immigrants and refugees—the most precarious among them in particular—are ideal scapegoats of the late modernity, which is characterised by the extensive, compulsory movement of people. In short, the ways in which the crisis has been represented, justified and rationalized, has opened up the space for intervention by the repressive mechanisms of the state, lashing out against the most precarious groups: immigrant women, HIV positive or merely indigenous sex workers who are mentally constructed as immigrant HIV positive—as was the case in this recent occasion, in the build-up to the 2012 elections.

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## 12

### Is the Crisis in Athens (also) Gendered? Facets of Access and (In)visibility in Everyday Public Spaces

by Dina Vaiou

It is by now widely acknowledged that four years of implementing bailout agreements with the IMF, European Commission and the ECB have led to a deepening and multifaceted crisis in Greece. Recurrent memoranda and more or less extreme austerity programs do not seem to provide effective remedies. On the contrary, they lead to deep recession and social crisis, while the promised recovery is postponed to an unknown future. It seems that the small and peripheral Greek economy has provided an easier site for neoliberal experimentation on a number of frontal attacks: to demolish whatever there is of a welfare state and abolish workers' rights, pension systems, wages and salaries, to reform an economy based on SMEs and self-employment and discredit informal practices of getting by, to attack the public sector and its tight links with family strategies, to marginalize democratic institutions and challenge national sovereignty<sup>1</sup>.

As the crisis deepens, lively and often conflictual debates take place among politicians and commentators across the political spectrum, with arguments which become "obsolete" very fast as the speed of local, European and international developments increases<sup>2</sup>. However, a dominant debate seems to consolidate, which focuses on the size of public debt, the re-capitalisation of banks, the probability of Grexit, the size and timing of a new loan installment etc. This macro-economic approach permits certain aspects of the crisis to

surface/occupy central ground while others are hidden or deemed peripheral and perhaps “luxury” concerns. Among these, questions of spatial scale or the diverging and unequal ways in which the crisis is lived in different regions and in particular places and most prominently cities, “where austerity bites, [h]owever, never equally” (Peck, 2012: 629). It is even more difficult to bring forward the “scale closest in”, i.e. the concrete bodies that suffer/resist the policies of austerity, or to debate openly the growing appeal of ever more conservative attitudes which weave together xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, class politics (see also Athanasiou, 2012). Analyses which stress the gendered facets of the crisis and its unequal effects on women and men are rare and do not permeate the allegedly “central” or dominant understandings (among the few are Karamessini, 2013; Avdela, Psarra, 2012). It seems that the issue is taboo, even among left-wing analysts; it is thought to pertain to a “special”, i.e. less important, matter which may detract from the “main problem”<sup>3</sup>.

### Missing from the picture

This short contribution is part of work that has grown out of my interest in the less debated aspects of the Greek crisis. Through a series of examples and taking the risk of “strategic essentialism”, I discuss some of the ways in which the current crisis, that is also or primarily urban, as Harvey (2012) argues, hits women as embodied subjects. I start from the premise that, behind statistics and macro-economic calculations, different women (and men) live with unemployment, precarity, salary and pension cuts, poverty and deprivation or shrinking social rights and mounting everyday violence in the crisis-ridden neighbourhoods of Athens. The stories (or “snapshots”) of ordinary women that I evoke here are drawn from research in different neighbourhoods of Athens (see for example Vaiou, 2013, 2014, Vaiou & Kalandides, 2013). These stories of significant changes in women’s everyday lives help to reflect on how concrete experiences fit in/diverge from general patterns and common understandings of “the” crisis when the spaces of everyday life become test beds for coping/resisting austerity and authoritarianism.

#### *“Suspended” bodies*

A significant part of austerity policies has to do with downsizing the state, which practically means the dismissal of thousands of public sector employees. Among them, 595 cleaners of the Ministry of Finance and 1700 administrative employees of universities. Administrators have fought a bitter and inventive

struggle, striking for three months at the end of 2013 against layoffs and suspensions and are now in a process of fierce negotiation with the Ministry of Education. Cleaners demonstrate in the streets for many months now, repelling police brutality and media misrepresentation of their struggle and demands. It is seldom, if at all, mentioned that these bodies in struggle are female<sup>4</sup>—women of different ages, persuasions and backgrounds. These bodies do not passively accept the dictums of the Troika; they claim publicly their right to a decent job and to bearable livelihoods.

*Exclusion from “the market”*

In the years of austerity, the registered unemployment rate of young women (under 25) has reached 61% (in 2013). Skyrocketing unemployment, whose effects are felt in many neighbourhoods of Athens, excludes young women, even with high qualifications, from a whole range of social rights, jeopardises life prospects and personal choices, let alone stable careers, and deters from even claiming publicly the right to decent paid work. Precarious small jobs with very low and irregular wages inhibit economic emancipation, restrict emotional and sexual choices and undermine self-esteem, mental stability and health—ultimately leading the most dynamic and creative to emigrate to more promising environments.

*Lapsing into “illegality”*

Cuts in salaries and pensions, along with dismantling of public services, feature very high in the critique against memoranda-inspired policies, particularly among Left analysts. What is hardly acknowledged, however, is the fact that this dismantling hits primarily (a) women as recipients of services for themselves and for other members of their households, (b) local women as workers in those services<sup>5</sup> and (c) migrant women as workers in home care, a sector which had spectacularly expanded since the early 1990s. Loosing a job as home carer jeopardises not only the livelihoods of migrant women but also their “lawful” presence in Greece and the livelihoods of their families elsewhere—pointing to the global/local links of the Greek crisis with many “other” parts of Europe and beyond.

*Living with violence*

The insecurities of unemployment, income cuts and precarity are aggravated by everyday fear, particularly in some central neighbourhoods of Athens where the Golden Dawn has chosen to claim territoriality and control over space. These practices and hate discourse, apart from direct violence, seem to lead to

a creeping acceptance of aggression and a fast slide towards more conservative attitudes part of which is rising sexism and the adoption and promotion of extreme sexist models, behaviours and discourses. In a context where violence becomes ubiquitous, violence against women, within families and in public, is also on the increase—albeit hidden in a conspiracy of silence. Data is rare but very telling: over the past three years, one in five women have experienced bashing or beating by their partners, one in two has experienced sexual abuse including rape, one in ten serious injury—while verbal and economic violence are on the increase<sup>6</sup>. By the same token, visibility in public space becomes ever more difficult and ambiguous.

### *Solidarity activists*

Coping/resisting the crisis is not limited to private arrangements in which women assume an ever increasing and more burdensome bulk of domestic and care work, in deteriorating and often violent conditions. It extends to women's dynamic, albeit not prominently visible, involvement in the wealth of solidarity initiatives which have sprung up in Athens (and other cities)—“an archipelago of social experiences” attempting to re-constitute a social tissue and cracking social bonds (Espinoza, 2013). These include collective action for immediate day-to-day survival (like soup kitchens, social groceries, communal cooking, social medical wards and pharmacies, exchange networks...), actions based on broader political claims and practices of living together (e.g. social spaces, local assemblies, advice and support centres, occupied public spaces, or “no intermediaries” initiatives), as well as attempts of making a living collectively (employment collectives). The generally acclaiming discourse of solidarity misses out a significant “detail”: the particular bodies which put in time and passion to keep these initiatives going are female bodies, often excluded from “the market” but dynamically fighting back in private and public everyday spaces.

## Re-visiting the crisis

The passage from general data and theoretical conceptions of “the Greek crisis” to concrete place/s and to the experiences of particular embodied subjects—and back—is not an easy project. But such crossings of scale help carry the argument forward in two directions. First, they help understand the multiple determinations of an otherwise unqualified “one-fits-all” reference to an almost generic conception of crisis. Second, they help shape an approach which

consciously oscillates between levels of reference which are usually kept apart: on the one hand, discourse/s and explanations constituted by “big pictures” and global analyses and on the other hand urban space and the spatialities produced through the bodily presence and everyday practices of individuals and groups. The uncertainties that the crisis creates seem to lead to more conservative behaviours and gender divisions of labour, to a hardening of gender hierarchies and to an increasing acceptance and “normalisation” of downgrading women. The sexist, racist and homophobic discourse and aggressive macho behaviours of Golden Dawn find fertile ground among people personally and collectively disenchanted with the “state of emergency” which austerity policies constitute. In this context, real or imagined threats settle in and affect everyday practices and ways of being in public space and in the neighbourhoods of the city, now shaped by insecurity and fear. At the same time, struggles against job “suspensions” and practices of living together in the common spaces of various initiatives (may) open room for empowerment and negotiations of gender hierarchies.

As the stories of ordinary women also tell us, living with multiplicity and mutual engagement and with a plethora of possible trajectories and life choices—constituting “a progressive sense of place” as D. Massey (1994, 2005) urges us—is more than a theoretical conception. It is a major stake, a process of familiarisation with difference/s and otherness, which includes controversies, requires investment of time and labour, both material and emotional, abundantly contributed by bodies which usually “do not matter”—bodies which move out of isolation and desperation into newly found ways not only of coping, but also of resisting the crisis.

In this sense, the stories of ordinary women are not an idiosyncratic particularity that can be easily ignored when we deal with (understandings of) “the” crisis. This choice of scale, linked in multiple ways to many other scales (local, national, European, international), reveals areas of knowledge that would otherwise remain in the dark, as feminist geographers have forcefully argued for many years. The change of focus (like in photography) does not mean amplification or diminution of the subject itself; it means a change of view about it. Stories which connect concrete bodies with global processes enrich our understandings with more complex and more flexible variables and inform the “big pictures”—and not only the reverse. Such a theoretical and methodological approach is important, I believe, also politically at the present conjuncture, because it provides a vantage point from which to re-examine the meanings and practices of “doing politics” and re-evaluate claims of access, visibility and participation in urban public space/s and discourses.

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## Endnotes

1 The harsh austerity measures demanded by the so-called Troika have met the unquestioned approval and support of Greek banks and successive governments. Only the political Left, in its many facets and groupings, has strongly criticised and resisted them.

2 For alternative analyses, see among many Douzinas 2013, Tsakalotos and Laskos 2013, Papadopoulou & Sakellaris 2012, Varoufakis 2011.

3 An exception here is unemployment, particularly of young women, to which I come back below.

4 One cleaner is a man and less than 25% in the administration of universities are men.

5 79% of women's employment concentrated in the service sector in 2009, which absorbed a high proportion of women with higher education.

6 See the recent survey by the Institute of Andrology on men's sexual behaviour: the aggressor's profile is that of a man a little over 40, with intense job insecurity or unemployed – but also 17% well-off. These data match the elaboration of results from the SOS helpline of the General Secretariat of Equality, as well as more scant data on wife killings, collected by the “feministnet” network.





# (METRONOME)

by Antonis Vradis





















It is impossible to predict exactly when history is about to take one of its turns, but it is entirely possible to feel swivels prior. For such change to actually happen, a critical mass is required; a mass of people convinced that change is necessary or—perhaps more often so—convinced or coerced to believe the existent is insufficient, therefore prepared to allow for such change to take place.

At the moment when this project commenced, in the early fall of 2012, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Greek territory is navigating through a swiveling moment—apparent, at least, if you read the global press, if you follow the events from afar. Take a birds-eye view of the city of Athens and the sweeping change is far less visible. Masses of people still traverse the urban web, caught in the urgencies of the everyday. From afar, normality prevails.

A closer zooming in, a sustained focus on the ground and the depth of reshaping quickly reveals itself. Social relationships and political allegiances and alliances are swiftly reconsidered and reconfigured. From the “Movement of the Squares” of the summer of 2011, to the unexpectedly diverse riots of February 2012, to the altering of the mainstream political landscape following the elections of May and June the same year... And since? Central Athens feels the most deserted it has been in times memorable. A tangible feeling of withdrawal lingers. People retreat, but where to? Some, to the secluded safety of the domestic. Others chose to take a leap into spaces unknown; into migration. In a time of extremes, space can only follow in the footsteps of class and politics. Just like them, it is stratified, polarised, divided. One is increasingly either working or upper-class; the middle is pushed to the brink of extinction. In the political sphere being moderate is most untimely; radical times call for a radical stance, for an extreme position. In a city of ever-deepening dichotomies the concurrent reformulation of its space is staggering. On the one side rises the triumph of the private. A retreat into the dwelling; a conquering of functions domestic over public, open interaction. On the other side—and in face of this attack—public space is rejuvenated, reinforced, reshaped and extended, often-times in the most unexpected of ways, in the most unexpected of settings...





**IV.**

# **THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN CRISIS**

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# The Right to the City in Crisis

## Section Opening

by Antonis Vradis

**Y**ou are only as good as your opponent, as the saying goes—and so, at the exact moment when the devastating, neoliberal forces that had been previously leading urban displacement and all-around catastrophe seem to go out with a bang during capitalism's current crisis, the *movements against* find themselves posed with an insurmountable dilemma, a soul-searching crisis of their very own: if the powers that had been leading this devastation now cease to be, what does this leave these movements on the ground to fight against—or for? This is a crisis, then, that is both of the city and of the right to it, as the section's title tries to convey.

In an attempt to humbly suggest some ways in which movements of opposition might diverge and escape the ill fate of neoliberal urbanism, the section opens up by looking at Athens' own, very particular Southern Mediterranean past and present: Lila Leontidou shows us how—in spite of its present hardship—this is a city that relishes its southern spontaneity and informality. Christy Petropoulou moves on to tell us how this question of informality is one that spans much beyond the Mediterranean shores, through her comparative study of spontaneity of everyday life and social movements in Athens and Mexico City. Then, in an attempt to—for once—find ourselves ahead of the curve, we have asked Tom Slater the question of how to fight back against gentrification, already during one of the very first steps in the process: to fight against, that is, the devaluation and depreciation that typically precedes a neighbourhood falling pray to the forces of the market. The question is one that had been posed directly by activists in Exarcheia—the neighbourhood hosting the conference itself.

More than once, the example of capitalist development in China has been hinted as a possible direction that economic and social realities might be verge toward; and so, it only made sense to understand what this development entails in the urban sphere. Facing up to the task, Hyun Bang Shin explains how urbanisation is part of the Chinese Dream—a political and ideological project directed by the state that leaves even greater an urgency for the right to the city to be fought for. Where does this lead us? In the closing intervention, Andy Merrifield suggests that resistance to the dominant order must somehow hook up the inside of the public realm to the outside: we must look beyond our immediate surrounding, beyond the tangible and the present, in order to pose a threat to dominant sovereign order—present and future alike.



## The Crisis and its Discourses: Quasi-Orientalist Offensives Against Southern Urban Spontaneity, Informality and *Joie De Vivre*

by Lila Leontidou

**T**hroughout the 2010s, Gramsci's basic distinctions and antitheses between hegemonic and coercive power, productive and parasitic activities, his constructivist notions of 'the South', and especially his concept of 'spontaneity', spring out of his interwar prison cell and return to the surface of the EU political economy. Drawing on these—alongside other concepts such as the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1968, Leontidou 2010, 2012a, Harvey 2012) and 'Orientalism' (Said 1978, Leontidou 2013)—we can conceptualize Mediterranean urban trajectories during the present crisis.

The South has always challenged or even reversed mainstream wisdom as recorded in recognized urban development models and geography in general (Leontidou 1990, 2012a), and has therefore been marginalized from mainstream textbooks. Mediterranean cities have refuted Anglo-American urban theory in the nineteenth century, by missing out on the industrial revolution and overt colonialism, and going through urbanization without industrialization; in the twentieth century, by reversing the Burgess spatial pattern through popular spontaneous suburban squatter settlements which have spatialized popular demands for the 'right to the city'; and in the twenty-first century, by suffering the crisis most acutely, and by contesting it, spurring snowballing global upheavals of spontaneous resistance to autocracies and for direct democracy against neoliberalism and the democratic deficit in the EU.

Mediterranean cities have thus become an annoying 'exception' to Northern models. Not only do Anglo-American scholars tend to define away Southern particularities and ignore them in their reasoning, creating a huge

gap in understanding these cities (Leontidou 1990); North European power elites also now stigmatize Southern particularities, adopting a quasi-Orientalist discourse from the standpoint of neoliberalism. Geographical imaginations emerge among dominant classes of the EU, close to Said's (1978) Orientalism, castigating 'the lazy, unreliable, and delinquent' Southerners (not Easterners, right now—Leontidou 2013). Northerners probably or implicitly recognize the subversive function of Mediterranean cities in overturning received wisdom about capitalist urban development, and defying the social settlement of the last 30 years, commonly called 'neoliberal'.

This means that the 'crisis'—a Greek word, between judgement and shock, as all Greek scholars tend to stress (Tsilimpounidi 2012: 548, Vradis, Dalakoglou 2011: 14)—is not to be limited to the economy, especially finance capital and its practices of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2012); it is not only manifested in society, with the breakdown of the social democratic settlement in the UK and the North and of informal and also popular modes of subsistence in the South. The crisis also engulfs broader cultural transformations, which include a fierce offensive against Southern cultures and ways of life. Through Gramsci's insightful analysis of 'the Southern question' in Italy, we can investigate the new dynamics of uneven development in Europe (Leontidou 2012b). Northerners sapped the vitality of Southern Italy and at the same time accused it as 'ball and chain', in Gramsci's (1971: 71) words, blocking the development of the North. This is exactly what Southern Europe and especially Greece is accused of today, by EU power elites.

At the epicentre of this offensive we find spontaneity and informality (Leontidou 2012a, 2013). Spontaneity, i.e. popular unmediated action, has traditionally predominated in Mediterranean settlements and economies, and now in social movements, just as defined by Gramsci (1971: 196):

The term 'spontaneity' can be variously defined, for the phenomenon to which it refers is many-sided. Meanwhile it must be stressed that 'pure' spontaneity does not exist in history [...] In the 'most spontaneous movement it is simply the case that the elements of 'conscious leadership' cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may be said that spontaneity is therefore characteristic of the 'history of the subaltern classes'...

In the past, we have used Gramsci's concept of 'spontaneity' heuristically, to understand historical trajectories of Mediterranean urban development until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Leontidou 1990). The suburban popular squatter settlements of Athens, Rome, Barcelona, Lisbon have been built spontaneously, with the

audacity of an informal economy of petty activities, where they belonged. They were tacitly accepted by governments as shock absorbers against homelessness and social upheaval. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, popular squatting has been substituted by homelessness and unemployment in the cities of the crisis, without any informal arrangements, let alone a formal welfare state and public housing outlets, which were always absent anyway. Worse still, urbanites are haunted by redundancies and evictions, cutbacks of wages and pensions, and over-taxation destroying the middle classes. 'Spontaneity' is still deeply embedded in the cities' roots, now even more literal and closer to Gramsci's concept about leaderless movements (Leontidou 2012a). In other words, recent alterations of 'spontaneity' consist in its juxtaposition to social mobilization.

Earlier forms of spontaneity, evidenced in informal housing and petty economic activity, have been squeezed by real estate speculation and finance capital. In Athens, speculation continues, or rather intensifies during the crisis. Large and privileged tracts of land along the urban coasts of Piraeus, Hellenico, Vouliagmeni are privatized in the 2010s at very favourable terms for investors. The few public funds available for urban development are directed not to deprived areas, but to the pedestrianization of the central Athens *boulevard*, Panepistimiou, and the decoration of an already privileged and well-functioning sector of the city, a linear area from Amalias St. in Syntagma to the Archaeological Museum and further North, disregarding the additional problems this will create to adjoining urban sectors. The media have unleashed an unprecedented marketing for this project and an exhibition promoting it took place in March 2014, in the Orpheus arcade, ironically, inside empty shops which have been hit by the crisis. Livelihoods destroyed left their derelict spaces to host an exhibition of the arrogance of real estate excesses. Exhibits included every detail of kiosks and tiles and water springs, but omitted any reference whatsoever to expenditure at a time of crisis, to winners and losers, i.e. real estate speculators and deprived urbanites.

In fact, neoliberalism not only entails the greed of bankers and real estate developers, but furthermore saturates society, through effective marketing, and marginalizes the impoverished people. Modernism has to impose order, and undisciplined subjects have to be neutralized by stigmatization and obliterated. It is already quite obvious that structural readjustments, coming from the power elites of Northern Europe, are targeting especially spontaneity and informality in their various forms. The state, a 'big brother', aims at controlling everything, centrally and digitally: every transaction, every mobilization, every step, sweeping away popular creativity together with destructive informalities of tax evasion by affluent dominant classes. We can discern in this an effort

for (neo)colonial de-hellenization of Greece via neoliberal ‘rationality’<sup>1</sup>. Popular spontaneity and informality undergo a destructive critique in accordance to Northern Orientalist stereotypes and fixations for ‘proper’ development, and are negatively branded as corruption, deceit, delinquency, illegality, shadow economy. Certainly, these are traits of dominant classes who speculate on the crisis and enrich themselves further, via accumulation by dispossession and tax evasion. They have nothing to do with the exploited and their spontaneity as defined by Gramsci. The confusion is intentional and politically motivated.

In parallel, unfortunately, spontaneity is among the Mediterranean traits most misunderstood by activists of the Left. Important figures of the Left, such as Glezos, criticize the concept (Leontidou 2012a) and scholars propose to move beyond spontaneity (Dalakoglou 2012). I would agree that we should, in order to pass from leaderless movements to a long-lasting emancipatory politics. But this will take time, as it seems, time during which grassroots spontaneity which unleashes popular creativity—a precondition for urban development—has to be supported.

Chances are slim, however. Spontaneity and the informal sector are not tolerated in Europe. “In these various ways, Mitchell observes, ‘the space, the minds, and the bodies all materialized at the same moment, in a common economy of order and discipline’” (Gregory 1994: 173). Cities must be squeezed into the straightjacket of Northern neoliberal ‘rationality’ and discipline. This analogy of a clash between modernity and postmodernity can be transferred to the wider Mediterranean urban histories (Leontidou 1993), and in fact at present to the EU periphery as a whole, where people are revolting against this exploitative ‘rationality’-as-austerity, against the EU democratic deficit, and their ‘othering’ by the North. Against all offensives by the power elites, the grassroots is reclaiming the city streets and piazzas with massive mobilizations as well as performances of anti-austerity protest and solidarity, ‘softening’ the city ‘from below’ (Tsilimpounidi 2012: 548, Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011). There are spontaneous mobilizations, performances, street art and graphic interventions, and there is a much wider cooperative and solidarity economy and cultural scene under construction. These radiate to the world an aspect of the economic crisis ‘seen from the everyday’ (Kaika 2012). We will concentrate on the two most massive instances, those of 2011 and 2013.

Since 2011 the spontaneous ‘movement of the piazzas’ in Southern Europe has been countering Northern Orientalist stereotypes with Southern creativity and new imaginaries. Athens constitutes part of a Mediterranean mobilized space, consisting of cities of Southern Europe and North Africa. The multi-activity and hybrid Greek urban piazzas had their focal point,

Syntagma Square, since 2008 (Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011, Leontidou 2012a). The ‘movement of the piazzas’ lasted long in 2011, and spread rapidly to many other Athenian smaller piazzas, town squares in the rest of Greece, and as far as Thessaloniki. After sixty days of occupation of Syntagma by massive ‘indignant’ crowds, a fierce police assault cleared it in late July 2011. Grassroots spontaneous creativity then reappeared less frequently, dispersed in fragmented Athens piazzas and squats, and in other towns.

It re-emerged, however, in the summer of 2013. The ERT courtyard, around the building of the Hellenic TV, became the focal point of focal point of solidarity and spontaneity when the Hellenic TV screens suddenly went black on 11.6.2013. The Greek government branded journalists ‘corrupt’, sacked them, and abruptly stopped every broadcast. Even the junta of 1967 had not dared to do this. In one night eight TV channels went black, including British, French and German ones, seven radio stations and nineteen peripheral ones were muted, orchestras including the ERT Music Ensembles and also Hadjidakis’ Orchestra of Colours were silenced, film and radio archives were blocked. In protest against this unprecedented act of censorship in Europe, spontaneity returned to the city in June 2013, with crowds from around Europe and beyond gathering in solidarity. The ERT journalists and employees who were sacked did not abandon the premises, but kept broadcasting in a co-operative online TV, a clandestine ERT channel in Athens and one in Thessaloniki, through web sites supporting their cause—like the one of the European Broadcasting Union, EBU, which broadcasted from 11.06.2013 and for the next five months<sup>2</sup>.

This has had important wider repercussions. Digital literacy was growing in the city, because of the thrust for Internet access! Online viewer numbers shot to very high levels in Greece after the ERT TV “black screen”, when the older generation, too, went online to watch the forbidden channels. This is embedded in an overall context of constant relevance of digital communication for mobilization in the Mediterranean throughout the 2010s (Leontidou 2010, 2012a, 2013).

Throughout the summer of 2013 and until that November, when it was ‘cleared’ by the police, the ERT courtyard was packed with a spontaneous crowd, creative artists and musicians, international visitors and celebrities, who came to speak to the public live and online. The sterile government Orientalism against the ‘corrupt’ ERT journalists, was actually an offensive against spontaneous communication, free expression, popular gatherings and concerts of solidarity. But it was also an offensive against *joie de vivre*, which was negatively branded as delinquency, laziness, and untrustworthiness, all along, since 2010. As we approached the ERT courtyard, radiating loud music

and announcements of yet more solidarity concerts, with the smell of *souvlaki* and the colors of the crowds, it was a temptation to agree with Raban (1974: 5):

But another, more frightening explanation presents itself: that the victims were chosen simply because they seemed to be enjoying themselves, having a good time, and that envy is perhaps an even stronger motive for violence than greed.

The offensive was indeed also against *joie de vivre* in 2011, when the Athens centre was vibrant with music and popular assemblies bringing back imaginaries of direct democracy, as in the ancient Greek *agora* (Leontidou 2012a); and when, in 2013, the shut-down of the Hellenic TV created a new round of concerts and public discussions. International reaction and solidarity both as the 'movement of the piazzas' revived spontaneity and against the shut-down of the Hellenic TV, reminds us of the Greek dictatorship, when imaginations beyond suppression, coercion and the Orientalism of dominant groups developed and sparked solidarity among European citizens, American and other people and intellectuals, turning their attention to Greece again, speaking to the crowds and performing for them, watching grassroots Athens become a creative niche in an autocratic environment. This is one of the urban futures to be cherished and sought after.

As a direct reply to the question of the conference, then, I do not think that the city's spontaneity and its informality will manage to seep through structural readjustments automatically and without support by alternative political formations. Gramsci (1971: 199) had already foreseen the danger, in a chillingly relevant paragraph, which imperatively tells us that Greece has to consider the 'Golden Dawn' neo-Nazis:

Neglecting, or worse still despising, so-called 'spontaneous' movements, i.e. failing to give them a conscious leadership or to raise them to a higher plane by inserting them into politics, may often have extremely serious consequences. It is almost always the case that a 'spontaneous' movement of the subaltern classes is accompanied by a reactionary movement of the right-wing of the dominant class, for concomitant reasons. An economic crisis, for instance, engenders on the one hand discontent among the subaltern classes and spontaneous mass movements, and on the other conspiracies among the reactionary groups, who take advantage of the objective weakening of the government in order to attempt *coups d'état*. Among the effective causes of the *coups* must be included the failure of the responsible groups to give any conscious leadership to the spontaneous revolts or to make them into a positive political factor.



Readjustments for more state control and coercion will hit hard and further weaken the vulnerable grassroots initiatives. On every level, spontaneity and informality come under fierce and violent attack whenever they surface in the city, as in 2011 and 2013, and will be unable to shape the future character of Athens during, but even most importantly, after the crisis. The EU and the government offensive has managed to colour informality with sinister meanings; as to spontaneity, it has not managed to even convince activists, let alone counter neoliberal discourses and practices, which have been destroying economies and cultures of the Mediterranean for over four years now. The worst impact of the offensive is visible in the empty shops and homes of a city which lost half of its population between 2001 and 2011 (within the Athens municipality), and is full of vagabonds and homeless people. A country which counts one in three of its youth unemployed and suffers an unprecedented brain drain of the flower of its youth migrating abroad cannot sustain grassroots creativity, which is anyway under attack 'from above'.

In the wake of social movements against austerity, spontaneity emerges as the *par excellence* force undermining neoliberal hegemony and bringing to the surface instances of creativity of the urban grassroots. The only hope that one can express is for the future to be shaped by the emancipation of the currently vulnerable spontaneous cooperative and solidarity economy and cultural scene under construction. But as spontaneous popular creativity is stifled 'from above' and discouraged 'from below', social movements are dormant and the sparks have not lighted up yet.

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## Endnotes

1 A direct analogy can be drawn here with the 'de-turkization' of nineteenth-century Greece via orthogonal grids in cities to replace the labyrinthine street layout of Ottoman settlements (Leontidou 2013).

2 This was at <http://www3.ebu.ch/cms/en/sites/ebu/contents/news/2013/06/monitor-ert-online.html> (last accessed in August 2013).

## 15

### Crisis, Right to the City Movements and the Question of Spontaneity: Athens and Mexico City<sup>1</sup>

by Christy (Chryssanthi) Petropoulou

Global shifts, neoliberalism and right to the city movements in Mexico and Greece

**M**exico and Greece comprise typical cases of the so-called semi-periphery where neoliberal policies have been applied (Mouzelis, 1986) but also where social movements tried to resist the implementation of the policies in question. During the 1960s and the 1970s these movements grew first in the build-up to, and then again following the rise to power of totalitarian governments (Mexico) and dictatorial regimes (Greece). Yet recent history and the movements that flourish within it are characterised by *glocal processes* (Koehler & Wissen, 2003). Mexico was faced with severe economic crisis in 1982 and then again in 1994 that intensified after the WTO order<sup>2</sup>, and despite the veneer of development given to the country in the early nineties, at the prospect of it joining NAFTA<sup>3</sup> (1994). The intervention, under special conditions, of NAFTA and the IMF<sup>4</sup>, increased the country's debt and its reliance upon those mechanisms—and the so-called “consensus of Washington” in particular. In the years that followed and up until the present date, these policies would accelerate, in the name of some swift economic development, the privatisation of public goods—most of which would take place under intransparent, oft-times scandalous conditions. They contributed to the increase of social inequalities while at the same time fuelling policies of surveillance and control, as well as para-statist organisations (Toussaint, 2006). Mexico has a long tradition of resistance: revolutions, great revolts and

guerilla movements, student and worker mobilisations, urban and peripheral movements, artistic movements, and so on. From 1994 onward in particular, this tradition was articulated through movements that would not only contest, but also put their claims into practice: most telling in this regard are the Zapatistas movement in Chiapas, the network of movements of the Other Campaign and many other social movements, among others. These movements managed to surpass bureaucratic trade unions and party organisations alike.

During the same time period and following the World Trade Organization (WTO) order (1994), Greece appeared to be in a direction of development, yet a type of development that was strongly dependent upon neoliberal decision-making centres and international organisations that were pushing for the privatisation of public corporations. The country's entering in the Euro currency after 2002 initially covered up but then made very evident the crisis in 2010, opening the discussion about the structural crisis that had been haunting its economy from 1982 already and prior even. The intervention of the so-called troika (ECB, EU Commission, IMF) led to painful financial measures and the privatisation of public goods comparable, and perhaps more demanding even than those imposed by the IMF in Mexico. This situation led to a sharp decrease in the standard of living and provisions in health, education and public services; an increase in social inequalities and the emergence of neo-fascist groups. From 2008 onward in particular, a multiform movement started to emerge with major mobilisations (Douzinas, 2013) that far surpassed bureaucratic trade unions or party organisations<sup>5</sup>.

From the 1950s onward, Athens and Mexico City saw some intense urbanisation with serious consequences for the environment and socio-spatial segregation, while at the same time maintaining a level of social mix in their centres (Hiernaux, 1997, Ward, 1991, Leontidou, 1994). After the 1980s, and despite the maintenance of such social mixing in central neighbourhoods, these divisions become more intense in the peri-urban space, while their centres started to become gentrified. During this time, many Right to the City movements (Lefebvre, 1968 and Vradis, 2013) start to emerge, focused particularly on the right to habitat—in Mexico City in particular. Yet from the 1990s on, the most important RttC movements concerned the claims to public space and common goods, while at the same time opposing privatisations (Petropoulou, 2011).

Contemporary attempts to impose a Northern-Atlantic way of configuring space and the relationships between people through the command of the IMF and its local overseers builds on from the attempt to create capitalist nation-states under the global watchful eye of the representatives

of major capital and its local political-economic allies (Graeber, 2011/2013). Perhaps, it then comprises the eventual culmination of the destruction and subsequent transformation of nation-states into more totalitarian neoliberal repressive regimes<sup>6</sup> of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2006). And so, capitalism’s great restructuring shifts have played and continue to play an important role in the changes that took place and still do so in cities and in the development of movements within them—in turn influencing a number of housing or environmental policies. Yet this relationship is not linear (cause/effect)<sup>7</sup> and it holds, in addition, some glocal (local-global) characteristics<sup>8</sup>.

So far, the response above appears to have carefully omitted any reference to the idea of the spontaneous. This idea, it would appear, is something widely accepted as fairly hazy and not of particular importance in the neighbourhoods of popular self-construction and in the revolts of the cities of the so-called “semi-periphery”. In the following pages, I will attempt to tackle and overturn this approach.

## The notion of spontaneity and its variations in the city and in the right to the city movements

As Holloway (2010: thesis 13) says, “*the abstraction of doing into labour is a historical process of transformation that created the social synthesis of capitalism: primitive accumulation*”. This period of primitive accumulation gave birth to capitalist relationships, and immediately followed the colonial era (Wallerstein, 2004). It was during this period that the new social relationships were established, primarily defined by economic relationships (Polanyi, 1944/2001). During this time, the body was the first machine to be invented—even prior (Federici, 2004) or simultaneously with the watch or the steam engine.

The people participating in acts characterised as “spontaneous” (*We build a house in a way of solidarity, we participate in a revolt in a way of solidarity, practising participatory democracy*) without rules enforced by any superior authorities, simply refuse to define their bodies as machines. They also refuse to put their thought to the service of political choices and relationships that do not concern them. This fundamental difference makes many thinkers from the Western (or otherwise Northern-Atlantic) tradition to see them as non-compliant to the rules and to name them as spontaneous<sup>9</sup>, stigmatising them as marginal (in order not to say the terrible word “masterless”).

The limits between the spontaneous and the organised are fairly blurry, hence referring to the social construction of difference<sup>10</sup> (Bourdieu, 1979) and

being related to *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986). Nothing is entirely spontaneous in the world's so-called spontaneous neighbourhoods (as the UN would define them in 1976) and in the so-called spontaneous uprisings: they are merely other forms of organising, which may set off as spontaneous manifestations, yet they are constituted through acts that are very much organised: it is for this reason that I name these neighbourhoods as spontaneously-born neighbourhoods. And it was proven that informal economy both played and continues to play an important role in the economic development of cities and of those spaces, resulting in the dropping of the term “spontaneous” by many official documents, too. As I have shown in another text (Petropoulou, 2007) the neighbourhoods of popular self-construction may have often-times been born in a spontaneous way, yet they developed in many and different ways, depending on the role of those acting<sup>11</sup> within and beyond these—and they were defined by various writers in different ways, depending on the socially pre-constructed approach they had for the landscape of these neighborhoods.

I therefore claim that the notion of the spontaneous way of expression is not an outcome of pressure, nor of the politico-economic crisis—but that it comprises instead an outcome of the years-long process partially related to the “tradition of rebellion” (Damianakos, 2003) that many people around the world share; between the many collectives or occasional encounters of residents of neighbourhoods of popular self-construction (particularly in the areas where RttC movements developed) and later on, of youth who participated in the recent uprisings of December 2008 in Greece and in the recent movement “Yo Soy 132” in Mexico, in 2012.

That it is more related to the notion of *prattein* (of creation, of non-alienating “labour”) and the culture of resistance that opposes repressive, alienating labour; not with some stigmatised “marginal spontaneity” that offers nothing and that is supposed to gradually diminish from contemporary society, just like writers of the 1950s had claimed when talking about the culture of poverty as well.

That it is more related to people inclined to create relationships of solidarity in order to respond to living needs, forming cracks in the compulsory relationships of exploitation and of their overall understanding as machines, as imposed to them from the outset of the birth of capitalism.

That it is related even more to dynamic minorities of the “human economies”, which can still feed “nowtopias” (Carlsson & Manning, 2010) and comprise possible cracks in capitalism. I explain this further on.

## The relationship between the spontaneous and human economy in the city

As noted by Graeber (2011/2013:290-296) the biggest pitfall of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been so: on the one hand, we have the logic of the market, where we think that we are individuals who owe nothing to one another—and on the other hand, we have the logic of the state, to which we are all indebted without ever being able to pay this debt off. Yet in reality, the two are not antithetical to one another: “states create markets and the markets presuppose states” (Graeber, 2011/2013: 295). If we were to apply this schema to cities, we would see that in the first case we have the private, purchased or rented residencies and individuals—all of which must act only out of individual interest, in any mobilisation. In the second case, we have the debt toward the state, which offers the so-called “social housing” and to the legal trade unions, which are there to defend our rights.

Contrary to the above schema lie the so-called “human economics”, which were only expunged with violence and constant surveillance from substantial portions of the planet. Human economics are economies in which what is considered important about people is the fact that each of them comprises an unprecedented link with the others and that non of these individuals can be the exact equivalent with anyone else (Graeber, 2011/2013: 296). The preservation of such relationships in societies like that of Greece or Mexico (bazar, non-precise demarcation of private and public space, solidarity economies at the level of family or friends, refusal of unjust debts’ payment, neighbourhoods of popular building self-construction thanks to urban movements, open solidarity occupations, grassroots unions of open assemblies—and so on) has to do with the fact that there is still a tradition of human economics deeply rooted in relationships that concern the land and the body: a relationship that, despite all major attempts to regulate and to succumb them, was never fully enforced on peoples’ everyday lives. In these, the highest goods are relationships and quality of life; not the accumulation of money and power through it. Cracks are left over, in other words, that may at points create revolts and overthrows<sup>12</sup>.

On the other hand, the development of a flavour of capitalism lacking any clear political or economic adjustment in these countries has led to an entire network of clientelist political relationships that reproduce the space and often-times obstruct the formation of social movements. Relationships of this type are not related to relationships formed on the basis of the spontaneous and of solidarity; instead, they are based on the logic of the state—or its

political representative, to which we are all supposedly indebted. But how was this debt created in the first place? Through this particular way of development of capitalism: since the state could not safeguard public goods and peoples' basic rights, this role was taken on by some politicians, for their protégées alone. In times of crisis, when they could no longer play this role, their role and relationship was revealed to the private sector and the state, through scandals that do nothing else than to confirm that "states create markets and markets presuppose the states" (Graeber, 2011/2013: 295). Through this process, and despite the fact that certain social segments may be turning toward new protectors (sometimes even to fascist organisations), there are moments when forces are released, directed toward claims over life; it is then that human economics are unveiled and flourish, once again—and the so-called "tradition of rebellion" (Damianakos, 2003) once again comes to the fore.

Typical examples of such are the recent RttC movements which commenced from mere claims of space and turned into wider political movements—such as the movement against the construction of an airport and large Mall-like complexes in Atenco, Mexico; the movement against the privatisation of the ex-airport of Elliniko in Athens and its adjacent beach; and the movements against gold extraction in Chalkidiki in Greece and in many parts of Mexico as well.

These movements are concerned with claims toward life and toward common public spaces; they oppose large-scale works that take place in the midst of crisis, during which a policy is heightened, holding as its central characteristic the selling-off of public and community lands and the creation of large projects without environmental studies and without the study of their potential social consequences.

### Social movements and spontaneity in the so-called semi-periphery

Regarding the relationship that politicised, anti-systemic actors may hold to these movements that were originally spontaneous, but consequently very much organised-from-below, and the discussion that has recently opened up (Leontidou, 2012, Dalakoglou, 2012). I will agree more with the approach of Zibechi (2010) who extracts his knowledge from the movements of Latin America. These approaches would be particularly useful for the comprehension of contemporary movements that have taken place in the Mediterranean in recent years. According to Zibechi then, the main characteristics of the contemporary movements of Latin America are as follows:



- Territorialisation (grounding) of the movements in spaces they have already occupied or retrieved (in this way, the de-territorialisation of labour does not affect negatively, as before).
- Claim of autonomy from the state and from parties.
- Re-estimation of the culture and defence of the identity of the popular strata (against the notion of the citizen, which would systematically exclude them).
- Creation of their own intellectuals, of their own education.
- New, decisive role of women in the everyday action of the movements.
- Interest in a more meaningful relationship to the natural environment.
- Non-Taylorist relationships—networks of self-organised groups (non- division between mind and body labour). Face-to-face relationships. Avoidance of large, faceless structures. Use of various social networks.
- Production of their own life, involvement with the everyday, with matters of shelter, food and the production of industrial goods—but also with matters of culture, education, health, entertainment...

At the time when this article was written, creative resistances that practice social economy have been on the rise (Wallerstein, 2008; Tsilibounidi, 2012; Petropoulou, 2013). The important thing is for us to follow their action by helping in their interaction, the exchange of experiences and actions—and not with some violent politicisation that may lead to their breakup or to their premature dismantling. The act of these collectives, which sometimes form social movements, resembles the movement of the so-called Zumbayllu: “the whirligig that transforms fear and poverty into light and hope, according to the myths of the indigenous people of Peru. The Zumbayllu means to invest toward the empowering of the movement of the flow against the logic of the representation that sacrifices everything in the name of order”. As Zibechi says: “the whirligig of social change keeps on revolving... The temptation for us to push it, in order to accelerate its tempo, may stop it dead on its tracks”... (Zibechi, 2010: 337).

### Conclusions, thoughts and directions for a most comprehensive research

As shown above, major structural politico-economic changes and tendencies led the international organisations have played a key role in local change,

and vice-versa. Yet the relationship of this interaction to the spontaneous is considerably complicated and related to *what, by whom* and *why* would be included in the discursive category of the “spontaneity”.

In order to respond to the question more fully, a type of a treatise would be required that would pose the following questions:

**1. How was human economy persecuted in Greece and in Mexico, and how were the so-called debts<sup>13</sup> and the so-called politics of clientelist relationships<sup>14</sup> formed? In order to respond to a question of this type we would go back to studies on the drawing of the first debt, which marked the birth of nation-states in many Mediterranean and Latin American countries** (Mouzelis, 1986; Svoronos, 1972; Beloyiannis 1952/2010), and in the processes which followed the first social revolution of the world, in 1910 Mexico (Gilly, 1995). The repression of the structures of human economy and community structures of participatory democracy which were formed during the periods of national-liberation revolutions, and the social revolution of Mexico in particular, happened in many and various ways exactly following the respective revolutions. And so, these revolutions never fulfilled their key demands (among which were matters concerning land, labour, housing and real democracy) which were instead skewed by the status quo and turned into an instrument of control of the everyday lives of the people. This, of course, has happened in most countries around the world.

**2. How anything that would not abide to the dominant new order was named “spontaneous” in an derogatory way and was identified with remnants of the past that had to be either eliminated, or civilized/modernized.** This is where we can initially re-read the descriptions of the travellers in Greece and in Mexico, who spoke of indigenous populations in a very derogatory manner, considering them to be “uncivilised”—and systematically tried play down their possible relationship to the ruins of the grand material civilisations they were there to record. And so for many years, the labyrinthine (organic) tissue of the city, the popular market, the popular feast, the popular art were accused of being a remnant of the past—after they were first meticulously separated from the scholarly one, which served the Western European-leaning status-quo instead. Naturally in Mexico this whole process was much more intense, since anything popular would be related to the long history of the indigenous peoples (Maya, Mexica, Zapotec, Huichol etc.) which had to be shown to be inferior to their conquerors, by any means possible (Villoro, 1950).

**3. How the revolts of 1968 re-opened the matter in another way, speaking in different terms about the spontaneity in Europe.** Inspired by the libertarian traditions of people of the world, these revolts commenced from the areas of Western Europe and the USA where the most severe repression of the spontaneous had become socially accepted. During this same period the critics of Leninist thesis about spontaneity (Lenin, 1902; Luxemburg, 1918) by existentialists (Sartre, 1970 and others) and many libertarian authors (Debord, 1968 and others) are intensified. The question is how the conversation about spontaneity was transferred to the countries of the so-called semi-periphery amidst great repression (Mexico 1968) and the dictatorship (Greece 1967), and how it was used for an analysis of the everyday life (Lefebvre, 1968 a, b; Gramsci, 1971). This discussion has since influenced research that focused on the cultural characteristics of Athens (Leontidou, 1994; Damianakos, 2003) and of Mexico City (Núñez, 1990; Canclini, 1995) showing interest for the so-called “marginal actors”, the “neighbourhoods of popular self-construction” and the hybrid-comparative forms of culture. These analyses showed that there never was an actual separating line between the spontaneous and the organised—but that this border was, instead, a social construction aiming at downgrading anything that was culturally different and threatened the status-quo.

**4. How the discussion about the subjection of the spontaneous returned through the crisis of the global biopolitical capitalism** (Castoriadis, 1999; Fumagalli, 2011) and through the interventions of the IMF and other global organisations in the social, financial, political, cultural and environmental situation of the countries of the so-called semi-periphery—while at the same time the notion of the spontaneous returns even in the primary research projects of financial corporations, which aim to embed it through the internet and behaviour prediction averting, in this way, the unexpected occurrence, the studies of the emergency, *The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (Taleb, 2007), etc.

**5. How, on the other hand, the so-called spontaneous resistances became, or may become, under certain conditions, dangerous cracks** (Holloway, 2010; Villoro, 2007). In this case, we would have to talk about the examples of contemporary revolts which were presented as spontaneous, since they were not related to parties nor syndicates—yet they were organised over a long period of time (e.g. the movement of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico) or other, more spontaneously organised revolts from below, which were then turned into an organised social movement (Oaxaca and Atenco in Mexico;

Chalkidiki in Greece), or still echo in the minds of the youth (December 2008 and the Squares Movement in Greece; Yo soy 132 in Mexico). The common elements between all these revolts is that they make decisions through open assemblies that do not have permanent representatives toward the outside (something that destabilizes the normal certainties of the status-quo and its politicians), that they have global characteristics, while at the same time being rooted in places of resistance where women play a determinant role in the organisation of everyday life, and that they continue their activity through new, multiform collectives. All of the above call for some further and more thorough investigation.

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## Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank Antonis Vradis for his contribution to the English presentation of this text
- 2 The World Trade Organization (WTO) replacing (1994) the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)
- 3 The North American Free Trade Agreement.
- 4 The International Monetary Fund.
- 5 Yet no contemporary social guerilla movements developed, as happened in Mexico, which had this kind of tradition.
- 6 On this matter see: Naomi Klein, 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster Capitalism*.
- 7 See the critique by Massey (1994) on the classic linear approach of history, which ignores space and leads to wrong views on the level of development of each country or each place.
- 8 A discussion on the previous one takes place in the volume by Petropoulou, 2011. This research argues that the big cities of the Mediterranean and Latin America present comparable processes of urban development imprinted in their urban landscapes. The concept of the urban eco-landscape enables the analysis and comparison of both cities landscapes at different spatial and temporal scales.
- 9 A typical example is the interpretation of the spontaneous as “indigenous” (between other interpretations) in an English dictionary.
- 10 On the construction of difference of the popular as an anti—Kantian aesthetic, see Bourdieu, 1986:42.
- 11 During the period between 1968-1988 the right to the city movements in Latin American spread and organised in a Latin-America wide, strong coordination network that would strongly fight back against mass repression. The decision by the “Habitat” secretary of the ONU “for the right to habitation” in 1976, which called for governments to aid, with infrastructures and loans, the residents of these areas, and not to go ahead with destructing them, arguably comprises the most important international u-turn on the matter.
- 12 The fordist model never fully reigned over the lives of people; further back even, when capitalism was being born, not all “witches” were burnt... Some escaped them, and many turned into guerrillas...
- 13 In this case I accept Graeber’s analysis of debt.
- 14 Also see Petropoulou, 2011 :38-50, 175-314.

## 16

### Unravelling False Choice Urbanism

by Tom Slater

[I]t was suggested that revitalization was rarely an appropriate term for gentrification, but we can see now that in one sense it is appropriate. Gentrification is part of a larger redevelopment process dedicated to the revitalization of the profit rate. In the process, many downtowns are being converted into bourgeois playgrounds replete with quaint markets, restored townhouses, boutique rows, yachting marinas, and Hyatt Regencies. These very visual alterations to the urban landscape are not at all an accidental side-effect of temporary economic disequilibrium but are as rooted in the structure of capitalist society as was the advent of suburbanization.

Neil Smith, 1982<sup>1</sup>, p.151-2.

**T**he architect and urban planner Andres Duany is widely seen as the father or guru of 'New Urbanism', an American urban-design-can-save-us-all cult that has gone global. New Urbanists are vehemently anti-sprawl and anti-modernist, and typically demonstrate near-evangelical belief in the construction of high density mixed-use, mixed tenure settlements with a neotraditional vernacular, well served by public transport, and 'pedestrian-friendly' (integrated by a network of accessible streets, sidewalks, cycle paths and public spaces). All of these features, if you can afford to buy into them, are supposed to nurture a profound 'sense of community' that will lead to harmonious, liveable and sustainable 'urban villages'. There has been a substantial critical backlash, but New Urbanism, now twinned with the fatuous rhetoric of "Smart Growth" (another anti-sprawl movement at which Duany has positioned himself at the centre), shows few signs of dissipating



(in Scotland, where I live and work, Duany was central to the formation of the SNP Government's Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative in 2010, and his dubious methods of 'consensus building' among local residents have been widely adopted by aristocratic landowners<sup>2</sup> and design consultants).

In 2001, Duany wrote an essay for *American Enterprise Magazine*, which is published by the American Enterprise Institute, a right-wing think tank. The essay was entitled "Three Cheers for Gentrification". An obnoxious and declamatory rant directed at "the squawking of old neighborhood bosses who can't bear the self-reliance of the incoming middle-class, and can't accept the dilution of their political base", it contains caricatures, trivialisations and myths that are too numerous to dissect in full here. Yet one passage in particular serves as a useful point of departure for this essay:

'Affordable' housing isn't always what cities need more of. Some do, but many need just the opposite. For every San Francisco or Manhattan where real estate has become uniformly too expensive, there are many more cities like Detroit, Trenton, Syracuse, Milwaukee, Houston, and Philadelphia that could use all the gentrification they can get. The last thing these places ought to be pursuing is more cheap housing. Gentrification is usually good news, for there is nothing more unhealthy for a city than a monoculture of poverty... Gentrification rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle class, and in the process improves the quality of life for all of a community's residents. It is the rising tide that lifts all boats.

If we cast aside the provocative tone of these sentences, and the patronising trickle-down logic, we see a perspective that is actually very common among many observers of gentrification across the political spectrum (whether journalists, policy officials, planners, architects, or less thoughtful social scientists). In a little piece of mischief back in 2006<sup>3</sup> I called this perspective the *false choice* between gentrification (a form of reinvestment) and a 'concentration of poverty' (disinvestment), drawing on these words in an excellent book by James DeFilippis:

Since the emergence of gentrification, it has become untenable to argue that reinvestment is a desirable end in-and-of-itself for low-income people and residents of disinvested areas. Instead, rightfully conceived, reinvestment needs to be understood through the lens of questions such as: What kind of investment? For whom? Controlled by whom? These processes have left

residents of low-income neighbourhoods in a situation where, since they exert little control over either investment capital or their homes, they are facing the 'choices' of either continued disinvestment and decline in the quality of the homes they live in, or reinvestment that results in their displacement. The importance of gentrification, therefore, is that it clearly demonstrates that low-income people, and the neighbourhoods they live in, suffer not from a lack of capital but from a lack of power and control over even the most basic components of life—that is, the places called home<sup>4</sup>.

These words lead us to the question of *how* low-income people can gain power and control over their homes, one which DeFilippis addresses via a riveting analysis of collective ownership initiatives such as community land trusts, mutual housing associations and limited-equity housing cooperatives in the United States. Yet since DeFilippis' book was published a decade ago, the false choice perspective has been tabled time and time again; indeed, I have lost count of the amount of high-profile statements on gentrification in the last few years and months that have succumbed to a tired formula: weigh up the supposed pros and cons of gentrification amidst attempts at levity ("Doesn't that new cupcake store have a funny name?!"), throw in a few half-baked worries about threats to 'diversity' and housing affordability, and conclude that gentrification is actually 'good' on balance because it represents investment which stops neighbourhoods from 'dying' during a financial crisis. Take, for example, a piece in *New York Magazine* in February this year entitled (predictably) "Is Gentrification All Bad?"<sup>5</sup> After opening up with the ambiguous remark that, "A nice neighborhood should be not a luxury but an urban right" (what makes a neighbourhood 'nice', of course, is inherently a class question), the author presents a brief history of the neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, once an emblem of disinvestment and racial segregation but now an arena for outlandish real estate prices, and remarks that "gentrification happens not because a few developers or politicians foist it on an unwilling city but because it's a medicine most people want to take. The trick is to minimize the harmful side effects". The piece concludes with the following:

an ideological split [in the 1960s] divided those who wrote cities off as unlivable relics from those who believed they must be saved. Today a similar gulf separates those who fear an excess of prosperity from those who worry about the return of blight. Economic flows can be reversed with stunning speed: gentrification can nudge a neighborhood up the slope; decline can roll it off a cliff. Somewhere along that trajectory of change is a sweet spot, a mixed

and humming street that is not quite settled or sanitized, where Old Guard and new arrivals coexist in equilibrium. The game is to make it last.

“Mixed and humming” hides what is a desperately fatalistic conclusion, but one very common in writing that reduces gentrification to a moral question (good versus bad) rather than a *political* question<sup>6</sup>. In sum, the *New York Magazine* article argues that gentrification is here to stay, we have to live with it, but it just needs some policy fine-tuning to stabilise or ‘manage’ it and soften the blows it inflicts, and the urbanist’s holy grail is the middle ground between “up the slope” and “decline”.

In order to situate gentrification in a more helpful political and analytical register, we must blast open this tenacious and constrictive dualism of “prosperity” (gentrification) or “blight” (disinvestment) by showing how *the two are fundamentally intertwined in a wider process of capitalist urbanisation and uneven development* that creates profit and class privilege for some whilst stripping many of the human need of shelter. No viable alternatives to class segregation and poverty will be found unless we ask why there are neighbourhoods of astounding affluence and of grinding poverty, why there are “new arrivals” and an “Old Guard”, why there are renovations and evictions; in short, why there is inequality. Despite many attempts to sugarcoat it and celebrate it, *gentrification*, both as term and process, has always been about class struggle. When we jettison the ludicrous journalistic embrace of “hipsters”<sup>7</sup>, reject the political purchase of the enormous literature on the gamut of individual preferences and lifestyles of middle-class gentrifiers, and consider instead the agency of developers, bankers and state officials, then questions such as *for whom, against whom* and *who decides* come to the forefront—and we can begin to see false choice urbanism as both red herring and preposterous sham. Then, we can start thinking about the agency of activists, and strategies of revolt.

After a visit to inner Detroit, to east Glasgow, to Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, or to the so-called ‘shrinking cities’ of eastern Europe, it is easy to understand why purveyors of false choice urbanism are so numerous. But they are left politically stranded when a theory of uneven geographical development is brought to bear on their “gentrification is better than the alternative” discourse. Arguably the greatest legacy to urban studies left by Neil Smith was the “ingenious simplicity” (as David Ley, one of his main interlocutors, once put it<sup>8</sup>) of the *rent gap* as part of a broader attempt to trace the circulation of interest-bearing capital in urban land markets, and to elaborate the role of the state in lubricating that circulation. But rather than focus on the classic 1979

paper where the rent gap concept first appeared, it is instructive to revisit a less-discussed Neil Smith paper which situated the rent gap within a broader articulation of uneven development at the urban scale, entitled “Gentrification and Uneven Development”, published in 1982 in *Economic Geography*. There, three aspects of uneven development were articulated by Smith, and gentrification was located within each aspect:

1) Tendencies toward equalization and differentiation: with the transformation of the earth into a universal means of production via the wage-labour relation, capital drives to overcome all spatial barriers to expansion (equalization), yet a series of differentiating tendencies (division of labour, wage rates, class differences etc.) operate in opposition to that equalization. At the urban scale, the contradiction between equalization and differentiation is manifest in the phenomenon of *ground rent* (simply the charge that landowners can demand, via private property rights, for use of their land), which translates into a geographical differentiation (central city versus suburbs, with higher ground rent in the latter). Recognising this contradiction, it becomes possible to see Homer Hoyt’s famous “land value valley” of the late 1920s in inner Chicago not as representative of some sort of residential “filtering” process, but rather indicative of capital depreciation, creating a “ground rent level quite at variance with the assumptions implied in the earlier neoclassical bid-rent models” (p.146).

2) The valorization and devalorization of built environment capital: valorization of capital in cities (its investment in search of surplus value or profit) is necessarily matched by its devalorization (as the investor receives returns on the investment only by piecemeal when capital is ‘fixed’ in the landscape). However, new development must proceed if accumulation is to occur—so the steady devalorization of capital creates longer term possibilities for a new phase of valorization. Here we are talking about speculative *landed developer interests* that David Harvey has since identified as “a singular principle power that has yet to be accorded its proper place in our understanding of not only the historical geography of capitalism but also the general evolution of capitalist class power.”<sup>9</sup> Why do rentier capitalists buy up—or grab—parcels of central city land and real estate and ‘sit’ on them for years, doing nothing? The answer is simple: devalorization of capital invested in the central city leads to a situation where the ground rent capitalized under current land uses is substantially lower than the ground rent that could *potentially* be capitalized if the land uses were to change. This is a rent gap in the circulatory patterns

of capital in urban space. When redevelopment and rehabilitation become profitable prospects, capital begins to flow back into the central city—and then substantial fortunes can be made.

3) Reinvestment and the rhythm of unevenness: under capitalism there is a strong tendency for societies to undergo periodic but relatively rapid and systematic shifts in the location and quantity of capital invested in cities. These geographical and/or locational ‘switches’ are closely correlated with the timing of crises in the broader economy (i.e. when the ‘growth’ much beloved of mainstream economists and politicians does not occur). Crises occur when the capitalist necessity to accumulate leads to a falling rate of profit and an overproduction of commodities (in recent years, these commodities are the various financial products that have emerged vis-à-vis the buying and selling of debt). The logic of uneven development is that the development of one area creates barriers to further development, thus leading to underdevelopment, and that the underdevelopment of that area creates opportunities for a new phase of development. In spatial terms, Smith called this a “locational seesaw”, or “the successive development, underdevelopment, and redevelopment of given areas as capital jumps from one place to another, then back again, both creating and destroying its own opportunities for development.” (p.151).

Smith’s work was of course subjected to considerable critique over the years, sometimes usefully (for example, the work of Damaris Rose on the “uneven development of Marxist urban theory”<sup>10</sup>), other times obstructively (most absurd was the argument that the rent gap should be abandoned as it is hard to verify empirically, closely followed by the daft bourgeois cry that the rent gap doesn’t tell us anything about the gentrifiers, when it was never designed to). In relation to false choice urbanism, the critically important point to grasp via an analytic absorption of these three aspects of uneven development is that investment and disinvestment do not represent some sort of moral conundrum, with the former somehow, on balance, ‘better’ than the latter. Nor does investment represent some sort of magical remedy for those who have lived through and endured decades of disinvestment. Gentrification and ‘decline’; *embourgeoisement* and ‘concentrated poverty’; regeneration and decay—these are not opposites, alternatives or choices, but rather tensions and contradictions in the overall system of capital circulation, amplified and aggravated by the current crisis. Rent gaps do not just appear out of nowhere<sup>11</sup>—they represent certain social (class) interests, where the quest for profit takes precedence over the quest for shelter. Rent gaps are *actively produced* (and

they are certainly being produced now under a crisis that has set capitalised ground rent on a downward spiral) through the actions of specific social actors ranging from landlords to bankers to urban property speculators, and the role of the state in regards to these actors is far from laissez-faire but rather one of active facilitator both politically and economically (it is notable that Smith's undergraduate dissertation<sup>12</sup>, the empirical study that led to the rent gap concept, carried the subtitle, "State Involvement in Society Hill, Philadelphia").

This leads to the question of political action and social movements. In light of the current conditions of crisis and disinvestment, I was asked, "What advice, if any, could be useful for the people of Exarcheia from anti-gentrification struggles elsewhere?" This is a demanding question and it would take several days to summarise the varied struggles that have taken place in the past ten years from Edinburgh to Gothenburg to Toronto to Mexico City to Melbourne, and to dissect the links between those struggles, the lessons learned, the gains made. When I was writing the final chapter of *Gentrification*<sup>13</sup>, I was struck by how little scholarship there was on resistance to gentrification. Whilst the Right to the City movement has since drawn considerable attention, it still saddens me that, at least in the UK, research funding has gone (and continues to go) to people who want to study the motives and desires of the middle-classes, or to those uncritically embracing the language of regeneration. So my immediate response, when I read the question asked of me, was "What can academics learn from the anti-gentrification struggles in Exarcheia and elsewhere?!"

Immediate strategies, ones that are making gains in cities like Madrid, include squatting that goes beyond the standard occupation of empty buildings (usually a strategy of highlighting the problems of housing commodification) to make a squat a collective provider of welfare and neighbourhood services (e.g. daycare, healthcare, adult education) that are being denied to people under the violence of austerity. Community land buy-outs are gaining traction in the UK now, especially in Scotland, but the barriers are immense, not least because of deeply ingrained landownership structures that will take a generation to dislodge. In 2001 I spent some time with an organization in Brooklyn that declared an entire neighbourhood where widespread displacement was occurring a "displacement free zone", and this involved a 'pro-community' awareness campaign, whereby the absolute necessity of informal support networks to vulnerable local people struggling to make rent was highlighted in every possible forum, in conjunction with organised pickets and protests outside landlords' homes, and the public naming and shaming of any landlord who slapped a rent increase on a tenant. Evictions dropped by 40% in a three-year period.

I am very suspicious of the view that gains can be made at the level of “informing policy”, as many British academics proudly trumpet. Under relentless urban growth machine pressures, the leap of perspective required for a policy elite to see the world as displaced person is significant. Insofar as states adopt gentrification as a housing policy—which they have done all over the world—they have little interest in research evidence on the extent and experience of displacement; such evidence would be tantamount to exposing the failure of these policies. Given that all major political parties in so many nations dance to the same neoliberal anthem on housing, it is naïve to expect, or perhaps even to lobby for, a policy programme of mass social housing construction or rent controls (indeed, the Coalition government in the UK appears actively committed to making people homeless via its infamous ‘bedroom tax’). Far more effective in contexts where gentrification is occurring has been campaigns for policy action beyond the scale of the urban, such as living wage campaigns. The scandalously high cost of housing in so many nations is consigning the poor to financial ruin, so the work of living wage activists is absolutely crucial to the right to housing. Policy interventions and even some social movements are too often “area-based”, when the differences that could be made at the level of the welfare state and labour market are substantial. Unfortunately, attacks on welfare states are happening all over Europe because these remnants of a Keynesian-Fordist political economy are viewed by the political class (and by the oligarchs they serve) as dangerous “impediments to the advancement of financialisation”<sup>14</sup>. To continue the relentless pace of expanding global accumulation, it is necessary to monitor and monetize more and more of those human needs that have not been commodified in previous rounds of financialization. Pensions, healthcare, education, and especially housing have been more aggressively appropriated, colonized and financialised. Anti-gentrification struggles should be—and usually are—unified with broader struggles to protect the legacies of the welfare state against the predatory attacks by this generation’s vulture capitalists.

To the extent that we are dealing with a systemic, structural problem, it would seem to be a critically important challenge for social movements to identify precisely where developers, capital investors, and policy elites are stalking potential ground rent<sup>15</sup>; to expose the ways in which profitable returns are justified among those constituents and to the wider public; to highlight the circumstances and fate of those not seen to be putting urban land to its ‘highest and best use’; to point to the darkly troubling downsides of reinvestment in the name of ‘economic growth’ and ‘job creation’; to reinstate the use values (actual or potential) of the land, streets, buildings, homes,

parks and centres that constitute an urban community. Another crucial tactic is to expose planning hypocrisy at any opportunity: when planners speak of their desires to create “mixed-income communities” in poor areas (almost always cover for a gentrification strategy), there is much to be learned from a coalition of public housing tenants in New Orleans that marched through the most affluent part of that city in 2006 holding a huge banner that said “Make THIS Neighbourhood Mixed-Income!” Another area of concern is to think carefully about how to challenge stigmatisation of people and places. Whilst such stigmatisation is central to the creation of rent gaps, it is also central to their closure, for discourses of disgust and social abjection can pave the way for a revanchist class transformation of space (e.g. “We need to clean that area up, it’s full of scumbags,” etc.). Unfortunately, even grassroots efforts to advance a different narrative of a place can end up backfiring, as an artificial edginess becomes appealing to real estate professionals and their “urban pioneer” clients suffering from what Spike Lee recently called “motherfucking Christopher Columbus syndrome”<sup>16</sup>. The Columbian encounter was uneven development by genocide and false treaty: accumulation by colonial dispossession. Today it’s the world urban system of cities competing for investors and creative-class gentry on the new urban frontier. It has always been in the “border areas that a killing could be made, so to speak, with so little risk of simultaneously being scalped.”<sup>17</sup>

False choice urbanism, more than anything else, is a pure exemplar of what Paul Gilroy has called the “poverty of the imagination”<sup>18</sup>. It thrives on the idea that more and more economic growth (represented by the mirage of ‘reinvestment’) is the answer to a crisis created by such greed, and thus it deflects attention away from the systemic failures and policy blunders that create, widen and reinforce urban inequalities. A mindless commitment to reinvestment and growth is the kind of ‘thinking’ that produced the largest global credit bubble ever seen, and then crashed in what even Ben Bernanke, the former Chair of the US Federal Reserve bank, called the most severe financial crisis in the history of capitalism. Disinvestment and reinvestment are both at the heart of today’s unequal urbanization of capital. Reinvestment represents a second-order derivative of the first round of the appropriation of monopoly rents. In the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *Urban Fortunes*, John Logan and Harvey Molotch offer some refreshing insights that might help arrest this poverty of the imagination:

For people in whatever type of place, even those at the lowest level of the earth’s place hierarchy, the appropriate stance should be critical. Alas, there



is least choice for those at the bottom levels, and sometimes resistance risks violent reprisal from authorities. But where it is humanly feasible, 'no growth' is a good political strategy. The status quo should always be treated as possibly better than the growth alternative. ("Don't just do something, stand there," is a slogan we have heard).<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the status quo is of course unacceptable, "stand there" not only calls into question growth-is-great arguments, but strikes a chord with highly effective anti-gentrification slogans of the past, such as "We Won't Move!" from Yerba Buena, San Francisco, in the 1970s<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, these words offer useful guidance for 'right to stay put' movements that seek to unravel false choice urbanism and expose gentrification not as Andres Duany's "rising tide that lifts all boats", but as a tsunami that wrecks most ships. As important as it is to explain the dirty process of gentrification, supported by accounts of destroyed lives, evictions, homelessness, loss of jobs, loss of community, loss of place, and so on, it's just as important to understand and fight the system that makes gentrification possible<sup>21</sup>.

## Endnotes

- 1 "Gentrification and uneven development", *Economic Geography* 58 (2): 139-155.
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- 5 Justin Davidson (2014) "Is Gentrification All Bad?" New York Magazine, 2nd February: <http://nymag.com/news/features/gentrification-2014-2/>.
- 6 Thank you to Mathieu van Crielingen for this excellent point.
- 7 Neil Smith nailed this: "A predictably populist symbolism underlies the hoopla and boosterism with which gentrification is marketed. It focuses on 'making cities liveable,' meaning liveable for the middle class. In fact, of necessity, they have always been 'liveable' for the working class. The so-called renaissance is advertised and sold as bringing benefits to everyone regardless of class, but available evidence

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- 8 David Ley (1996) *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: OUP). Quotation from p.42.
  - 9 David Harvey (2010) *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books) Quotation from p.180.
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  - 17 Neil Smith (1996) *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge) Quotation from p.209.
  - 18 See <http://dreamofsafety.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/paul-gilroy-speaks-on-riots-august-2011.html>
  - 19 John R. Logan and Harvey Molotch (2007) *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (20th Anniversary Edition) (Berkeley: University of California Press). Quotation from p.xxii.
  - 20 Chester Hartman (1974) *Yerba Buena: Land Grab and Community Resistance in San Francisco* (San Francisco, Glide Publications).
  - 21 My sincere thanks to Elvin Wyly for helping me to sharpen these closing paragraphs.

## Contesting Speculative Urbanisation and Strategising Discontents

by Hyun Bang Shin

Clearly, everyday domicile is as systematic and widespread as the pursuit of economic interest. It has affected and will continue to affect large numbers of mostly powerless people, especially in the developing world. The murder of homes is an intentional act. Domicide violates and terrorizes its victims as bulldozers and cranes reduce their homes to rubble. It severs its victims' lifetime attachment to homes and community and deprives them of the built environment that has shaped their tradition and identity. It also wounds their sense of dignity. Everyday domicile, in other words, in many ways cruelly redefines the existence of its victims and severely diminishes, if not destroys, the quality of their lives. Considering all of the immediate and lingering damage it causes, perhaps it is time to think of domicile as something beyond mere 'moral evil'

(Shao, 2013, p.28)

In her latest book on displacement in Shanghai, Qin Shao vividly reports the disastrous effects of China's urban development that evicts people from their homes, demolishes long-established communities and impairs people's psychological well-being. While her findings are largely based on the city of Shanghai, the stories of uprooted families and flattened dwellings are reminiscent of millions of other similar cases around the world. In China, such traumatising human consequences have been facilitated and exacerbated largely by the Chinese state's drive to transform its nation into an urban society, resulting in the country's own version of 'urban revolution'.

## China's urbanisation as a political and ideological project

China's urbanisation is a political project that receives the utmost attention from the top leadership. When China's new Party leadership came to power in late 2012, a heavy emphasis was placed on sustaining the country's stride to urbanise. It was openly claimed that China would achieve a 60% urbanisation rate by the year 2020 and 70% by 2030 as part of realising the China Dream (Kuhn, 2013<sup>1</sup>). This was equated with the addition of another 300 million urbanites by 2030. Obviously, this does not mean that all 300 million rural villagers are to migrate to existing cities. It is expected that this addition would occur through the further expansion of small and medium-sized cities, townships and counties and through the conversion of rural villagers into urban citizens and their relocation from original villages (as was the case in Chongqing). Measured by the share of urban residents in the nation's total population, and official enumeration of urban population obviously faces all sorts of limitations and errors. However, what is important is not its accuracy nor the possibility of putting this into reality, but the political statement of aspiration by the Party State that proclaims the Party State's commitment to continue with the state efforts to maintain the extant processes of urban-oriented accumulation.

China's urbanisation is also an ideological project that envisages the urban as the most desirable status quo for the country and population. Vertical landscape resulting from the amassing of state-of-the-art skyscrapers and high-rise estates becomes the representation of China's newly found modernity and the symbol of its latest economic success as well as global prominence. The 2010 World Expo held in Shanghai vividly exhibited this urban-oriented political rhetoric. While the Shanghai Expo's official English slogan was 'Better City, Better Life', the Chinese slogan targeting its domestic audience had a completely different nuance: It read 'Chengshi, rang shenghuo geng meihao', which can be literally translated into English as 'City makes (your) life happier' (see Figure 1). While the slogan in English was emphasising the importance of improved urban management, the slogan in Chinese was simply an emphasis on the 'city living' itself. In other words, all that is required for a happy life is to live in cities. The question is: who does China's urbanisation truly benefit and who loses?



Figure 1: The slogans of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo  
(Photographed in 2010 and edited by Hyun Bang Shin)

China's urban revolution comes with large-scale population sorting and displacement. Existing major mega-cities like Beijing and Shanghai go through the redevelopment of its inner-city cores as part of their attempts to convert the space into a higher and better use and transform the cities into 'world cities': this endeavour involves the attraction of particular types of urbanites (highly skilled professionals and expats) and the displacement of low-skilled workers and low-end service industries. One of the two inner-city districts, which accommodate the new CBD was announcing in 2012 that it would aim to displace 100,000 residents from the district by 2015, with the long-term goal of 30% population reduction in the next 30 years (Jin, 2012<sup>2</sup>). The aim was to transform the urban space to attract highly skilled migrant workers including expats and to rid of low-skilled workers and the poor who do not conform to the 'world-class' urban image.

### Speculative urbanisation: the reinforcing interaction between the primary and secondary circuits of accumulation

China's urbanisation produces urban-oriented speculative accumulation that is centred on the commingling of the labour-intensive industrial production with the heavy investment in the built environment (e.g. high-speed rail networks, airports and metro construction as well as commercial real estate projects).

The Chinese central and local states have been particularly proactive in making sure that these processes are mutually reinforcing, ensuring that productive investments in the built environment are made as a means to facilitate the primary industrial production. The investment in fixed assets has been a quick speculative solution to ensuring the GDP growth at both local and national scales. According to government statistical yearbooks, real estate construction has also been growing phenomenally, accounting for more than half of fixed asset investment in major cities like Beijing in the 2000s (see also Shin, 2009<sup>3</sup>, pp.128-130). The speculative urbanism is also spreading to other second and third tier cities and to counties that try to emulate the kind of urbanism originally centred on the eastern coastal region.

In this regard, China's urban revolution differs from the experiences of the post-industrial West that has seen the ascendancy of the secondary circuit of capital accumulation in place of the declining industrial production (see Harvey, 1978<sup>4</sup> and Lefebvre, 2003). As Henri Lefebvre states, "As the principal circuit, that of industrial production, backs off from expansion and flows into 'property', capital invests in the secondary sector of real estate. Speculation henceforth becomes the principal source, the almost exclusive arena of formation and realization of surplus value... The secondary circuit thus supplants the primary circuit and by dent becomes essential" (Lefebvre, 2003, p.160). For China, it is not simply the over-accumulation in the primary circuit of industrial production, which facilitates the channelling of fixed asset investment into the secondary circuit of built environment. Both circuits reinforce each other's advancement, while the state monopoly of financial instruments provide governments and state (and state-affiliated) enterprises to tap to the necessary finance.

China's domestic regional disparities are turned into advantages for capital to further exploit surplus labour. In discussing the logics behind the emergence of East Asia and China from a geopolitical perspective, Giovanni Arrighi (2009) refers to the ways in which the United States-led reconfiguration of East Asian geopolitical economy resulted in the establishment of vertical integration of firms in low-cost labour-intensive production network, initially led by Japanese firms that exploited its former colonies such as South Korea and Taiwan, and later adopted by the East Asian tiger economies to 'snowball' such practices to other Asian and Chinese economies as the labour costs of initial recipients of such production facilities rose (Arrighi, 2009). China's rise and export-oriented industrialisation based on low-cost labour-intensive industries is the process of internalising this snowballing process. Labour exploitation therefore occurs to ensure the capping of labour costs in industrial

production as much as possible. For the foreseeable future, this internal snowballing process of industrial relocation seems likely to continue given the huge geographical scale of China, but obviously this will face greater frictions as years go by.

Therefore, China's uneven development fuels this process of commingling the primary circuit of industrial production with the investment in the built environment. This is epitomised by the gradual infiltration of Foxconn, the Taiwanese electronic goods manufacturer, into the central region. Foxconn, which is known to be the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer, has been expanding its factory basis from the Guangdong province to other locations in the central region, where land and labour supply can be acquired more cheaply (Pun and Chan, 2012<sup>5</sup>). The expansion is facilitated by the intervention of entrepreneurial local states that ensure the timely provision of land and infrastructure to accommodate both workers and capitalists. Local states in particular also ensure that capital enjoys access to pacified and disciplined workers as much as possible. Such investments in both production facilities, infrastructure and housing occur not only within existing cities, but also in urban peripheries and rural villages as well as in special zones of exception, combined together to produce the urban. The city as the container does not become a meaningful unit of analysis, as this process of accumulation through the secondary circuit does not limit itself to existing urban (administrative) boundaries but spills over onto peripheries (see also Brenner and Schmid, 2014<sup>6</sup>; Merrifield, 2013<sup>7</sup>). The urban is also created in rural and suburban areas as well as the rural is reborn in urban counterparts (see Keil, 2013). In this way, China is urbanising as urbanism spreads to inner regions away from the eastern coastal centre. It does this by taking advantage of the geographical uneven development of production and reproduction of labour power, while controlling for demand (for urban citizens) and for supply (proletarianisation to continue to supply cheap labour). China's construction of capitalism therefore is the urbanisation process itself.

### The right to the urban as a political project

As the built environment has become both the end and the means of capital accumulation, the right to the city remains important in China as a political project (Shin, 2013). While some critics may discuss the limitations of the right to the city (or right to the urban, given the limitations of the city as an analytical unit) to become an effective mobilisation principle for urban social

movements, it still remains an important conceptual framework in China's urbanisation, as the country sees the significant position of the secondary circuit of accumulation heavily controlled and manipulated by the state and capital<sup>8</sup>. In this process of urban accumulation, urban spaces, old and new, increasingly embody the rapidly exacerbating inequalities in society. While the fruits of accumulation benefit the top officials, overseas investors and domestic industrialists as well as the emerging middle class populace, the masses—including rural villagers—experience dispossession of their lands as local governments carry out land-grabbing to put this land into industrial and commercial use. Homes are flattened as part of land assembled to make ways for more lucrative sources of revenue for local governments, who also aspire to promote 'world-city' landscapes. Workers, most of whom consist of migrants from rural hinterlands, face harsh working environments, poor job securities and suppressed wages. Affluence rises in major cities as centres of accumulation, but the pace of wealth accumulation alienates those who produce it.



Figure 2: Flattened former rural village in Guangzhou  
(Photograph by Hyun Bang Shin, 2010)



China's unequal processes of urbanisation and accumulation therefore indicate that there is a strong urgency for the country's masses to claim the right to the urban. It is going to be a revolutionary project to organise the urban according to inhabitants' need and desire, aiming at taking the power from the state and capital that produce the urban in their own taste (see Marcuse, 2009<sup>9</sup>). Claiming the right to the urban is also inevitably a political project as it only has any chance of seeing any kind of success when disparate classes experiencing exclusion and deprivation come together across regions, which the Chinese state endeavours to stop from emerging. Here, for grassroots organisations, jumping up the scale to overcome spatial isolation is very important (Smith, 1992). So are the efforts of regional, national and transnational organisations to link up with grassroots organisations to contextualise and embed universal agendas in concrete realities.

### Constraints on claiming the right to the urban

In China, claiming the right to the urban faces huge constraints for a number of reasons. First, claiming the right to the urban directly challenges the state that sees urbanisation as the fundamental basis of the country's development and economic engine, for the reasons explained above. Second, the authoritarian Chinese state is highly sensitive to any bottom-up struggles to form cross-class and cross-regional alliances to challenge authority (see Shin, 2013<sup>10</sup> for more detailed discussions). While various socio-economic reform policies have been designed and put into practice, political reform is deeply lagging behind. While some measures have emerged to enhance local democracy (e.g. village and urban community election), democratic experiments still remain isolated and heavily influenced by the Party State. Third, as China's urbanisation is also regarded by the state as a nationalist project built on the rise of China's geopolitical power, rights claimants may be seen as hindrance to societal progress and national prestige. Socio-economic inequalities and regional disparities are often glued over by the logics of nationalism (e.g. China Dream) that is increasingly replacing socialism as the ideological basis of running the country by the Party State. In this regard, the voices of discontent (including voices of separatism in the Western region) are suppressed in order to ensure the stability of the country, and nationalism acts as a means to justify the Party State's intervention in society (see Shin, 2012<sup>11</sup>).

More recently, the state project to build a middle class society provides an ambiguous but not so promising situation for any claim on the right to the urban by the masses. When the director of the Research Office of the State

Council was reporting on the size of China's middle class in 2007, about 6.5% was estimated to belong to the middle class, who enjoy an annual household income between 60,000 and 500,000 yuan (China Daily, 2007<sup>12</sup>). Looking at the household disposable income in 2006 according to the China Statistical Yearbook, the bottom threshold of such an income range refers to mostly the highest income decile group that the government was envisaging as being the middle class. The middle class that the Chinese Party State envisages is clearly the most affluent in China's urbanising society, whose lives are detached from the masses. While the middle class (including managerial personnel, professionals and office workers—see Chen, 2013 for this occupation-based classification) is known to be advocating individual rights, a recent study by Jian Chen (2013) finds that China's middle class populace tends to endorse state policies and feel reluctant to the expansion of democratic rights such as the right to politically mobilise and launch popular protests unsanctioned by the state. On the other hand, what turns out to be more progressive is the lower class, that includes blue-collar industrial and service sector workers, the small-scale self-employed, the unemployed, retirees and college students. Nurtured by the state and being the major beneficiaries of the state-led urban accumulation and economic development, China's middle class populace is unlikely to be an agent of social change; for as long as the state protects their wealth and ensures their current economic position, they would be unlikely to join up with the rest of the society in what Andy Merrifield (2011) refers to as "crowd politics".

### Strategising discontents

Let me conclude. I have argued in this essay that China's speculative urbanisation is both an ideological and a political project that disrupts and destroys the lives of the masses, while it is the few that benefits from it. As the state and capital proceed with their heavy investment in fixed assets and rewrite the built environment, displacement becomes the norm for villagers and urbanites. As China's urbanisation hinges on the primary circuit of industrial production as much as it does on the secondary circuit of built environment, there is a potential for workers' struggles to form an alliance with urban inhabitants' struggles to protect their neighbourhoods and communities. In other words, China's particular trajectory of urbanisation requires the right to the urban struggles to be inclusive of the struggles by the new working class, who are fighting for their access to the 'redistribution' of surplus value and for their 'recognition' as legitimate citizens and not simply migrants (Han, 2013; see

Laclau and Mouffe, 2001 for the emphasis on ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’). The cross-class alliance of the type above, which had emerged and prompted the brutal oppression in 1989, would be something that may not be established in the near future but remains to be a political imperative if the hegemony of the dominant interests is to be subverted. The alliance is in need of further inclusion of village farmers whose lands are expropriated to accommodate investments to produce the urban, and of ethnic minorities in autonomous regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang whose cities are appropriated and restructured to produce Han-dominated cities.

What else is to be done to challenge the state and capital in China? Here, I refer to the proposition of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who wrote in November 2000 for their preface to the second edition of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*:

To be sure, we have begun to see the emergence of a series of resistance to the transnational corporations’ attempt to impose their power over the entire planet. But without a vision about what could be a different way of organizing social relations, one which restores the centrality of politics over the tyranny of market forces, those movements will remain of a defensive nature. If one is to build a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles, one needs to establish a frontier and define an adversary, but this is not enough. One also needs to know for what one is fighting, what kind of society one wants to establish. This requires from the Left an adequate grasp of the nature of power relations, and the dynamics of politics. What is at stake is the building of a new hegemony. So our motto is: ‘Back to the hegemonic struggle’

(Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.xix)

It will be important for the discontented to educate themselves and others to reveal the underlying logics of China’s capital accumulation, how it produces a hybrid of developmental statism and neoliberalism, how it evades the Chinese state’s own legitimacy (by constantly deviating from the socialist principles and by producing prosperity at the expense of the masses’ economic hardship), and how the fate of urban inhabitants is knitted tightly with the fate of workers, villagers and others subject to the exploitation of the urban-oriented accumulation.

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- 7 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01189.x>
- 8 Here, the capital includes all types of capital (joint ventures, etc.) that maintain various forms of connections with the state despite the absence of state presence in the investment structure of a given company.
- 9 [http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13604810902982177#.U1\\_dO6alU6I](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13604810902982177#.U1_dO6alU6I)
- 10 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12010>
- 11 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2012.734076>
- 12 [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-06/21/content\\_899488.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-06/21/content_899488.htm)

## Against Accountancy Governance: Notes Towards a New Urban Collective Consumption

by Andy Merrifield

In 1977, when Manuel Castells' classic book, *The Urban Question*, was first put into English, I'd been a year out of secondary school, in Liverpool. It was five years after its original French publication, four years since an OPEC oil embargo had sent advanced economies into giddy noise dives, and a year on from the Sex Pistols' début hit, *Anarchy in the UK*. They were heady times, the 1970s, full of crises and chaos, a post-1968 era of psychological alienation and economic annihilation, of Punk Rock and Disco, of Blue Mondays and *Saturday Night Fever*. The decade was also a great testing ground for a book bearing the subtitle, *A Marxist Approach*. Indeed, the same year as *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* became available to Anglophone audiences, the Sex Pistols were screaming, "THERE'S NO FUTURE, NO FUTURE FOR YOU AND ME!"

I didn't know *The Urban Question* back then, nor much about Marxism; I was eighteen, hardly read anything, and remember most of all the candlelit doom of Callaghan's "Winter of Discontent". Power cuts, strikes and piled up rubbish seemed the social order of the day. And the Sex Pistols' mantra of NO FUTURE seemed bang on for my own personal manifesto of the day. I became, largely without knowing it, something of a fuck-you anarchist, not really knowing what to do, apart from destroy—usually myself: "what's the point?" Johnny Rotten had asked. I didn't see any point. The decade was dramatized by sense of lost innocence. I watched my adolescence dissipate into damp Liverpool air, into a monotone gray upon gray.

It was only in the early 1980s that I first learnt to read and write to survive. By then, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and I'd discovered something never encouraged at school: I loved to write, loved to write about things I'd read, about things I'd done, people I'd met. Before long, I'd gained access to the local Polytechnic as a "mature student," as a second-chance scholar, as a scholar-with-attitude. That as the Thatcherite project was in full flight dismantling welfare statism; multiple levels of local and national government felt Thatcher's "free market" heat, got abolished, abused, and recalibrated to suit the whims of an ascendant private sector.

This posed some pretty tough intellectual and political questions for my friends and I at Liverpool Polytechnic, as we passed our time wondering how to intellectually fill the post-punk void. We hated the bourgeois state with serious venom. We wanted to smash it, rid ourselves of its oppressive sway. So when Thatcher started to do just that, we were left wondering where to turn? Did we want that nanny state back? Life had been boring and programmed with it, but maybe things were going to be much worse without it?

In retrospect, 1984 seems a watershed, the significant year of contamination: Ronald Reagan had begun his second term and the Iron Lady had survived the Brighton Bombing; the IRA's attempt to finish Thatcher off had the perverse effect of only setting her more solidly on her way, propelling her full-kilter into dismantling the post-war social contract between capital and labor, taking on (and taking out) organized labor and organized opposition in the process; Arthur Scargill and the miners took it full on the chin so marking *the* defining moment in a power shift between organized labor and an ascendant (postindustrial) British ruling class. With the miners defeat, Thatcher's central government was able to push through, and further consolidate, its aggressive policies of fiscal conservatism.

Thatcherism was duly borne and a strange, almost inexplicable, act of incorporation and co-optation, of universal reabsorption, had thereafter taken place. The Sex Pistols' "NO FUTURE! NO FUTURE FOR YOU AND ME!" had, by 1984, been squashed, beaten down, morphing into Michael Jackson and USA For Africa's harmonizing refrain: "We are the World." From wanting the world in 1967, as *The Doors* had demanded, there was no world worth having by 1977: the music was over; and yet, as we hobbled into the 1980s, suddenly we were told that somehow we now were the world. That NO FUTURE had been thrown back in our faces: we were this no future, this TINA, and we've all been living with it ever since.

Maybe 1984 signaled the real end to the 1960s, sealed its fate. 1984 heralded the beginnings of the post-political, of the formal subsumption of Thatcherism and its apotheosis and real subsumption under neoliberalism. Maybe 1984 meant the end of continuing the old tradition of radical politics, using the same mindset, the same workerist politics, the same frames of reference and militancy. Making a racket 1960s style, or even 1970s and 1980s style, seems no longer tenable today, no more the required politics to tackle a capitalist beast that has absorbed us within it, wholesale and wholesale, lock, stock and barrel. Something else is needed than the desperation of Zoyd Wheeler, Thomas Pynchon's hippie anti-hero from *Vineland*—which, remember, is also set in 1984—leaping through plate glass windows, breaking on through to the other side, trying to cling on to his government stipend as a mental degenerate. There is an innocent charm to Zoyd's antics, as well as touching fatherly concern about his teenage daughter Prairie, about how she's going to grow up in a world whose value system is all bad karma for Zoyd. Yet the problem is that there's equally something pathetic about old Zoyd, too, trapped in his dope-hazed past, paranoid about the Reaganite present, paralyzed about thinking of a post-Reaganite future. Beneath the cobblestones there is no longer any beach; and if there is, its waters are now too polluted to permit nude bathing<sup>1</sup>.

1984 was also the year I discovered Castells' *The Urban Question*. The thing that immediately struck me, I remember, was its cover: Paul Klee's *Blue Night*. Only recently—very recently in fact, this past January at a London Tate Modern Klee retrospect—did I eventually see for myself Klee's enigmatic canvas, from 1937, one of his last, an unusually expansive (50X76cm) work in an oeuvre characterized by intricacy and smallness. For a long while *Blue Night* was one of my favorite paintings. I'd always wondered whose choice it had been to have it adorn a book about Marxism and the city? Castells' own? I still don't know. The other thing that intrigued me about *The Urban Question* was its heavy Althusserian Marxism. I'd borrowed Louis Althusser's *For Marx* from the Poly library, trying to figure out what was going on. Little made sense initially. Only a lot later did I recognize how Castells mobilized in original and idiosyncratic ways twin pillars of Althusserian formalism: *ideology* and *reproduction*.

Unlike Althusser, this was Althusserian formalism applied to the real world, to the conflictual urban condition of the 1970s, to the fraught decade when capitalism attempted to shrug off the specter of post-war breakdown, the decade when I attempted to shrug off my own crisis, a coming of age in an age not worth coming of age in. Moreover, although this urban system was declining, was in evident trouble everywhere, collapsing entirely it wasn't.



Castells wanted to know why. “Any child knows,” Althusser had said in his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” “that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year.” The citation, a paraphrase of Marx, in a letter to Dr. Kugelman (July 11, 1868), summed up the whole point of Volume Two of *Capital*: without reproduction there could be no production; without the realization of surplus-value, no fresh surplus value could ever get produced; production is predicated on extended and expanded reproduction. And yet, given inevitable ruptures in the “normal” functioning of capitalist production, how come capitalism survived then, still survives?

Althusser actually passed over all the stuff about reproduction of capitalist relations of production from Volume Two of *Capital*, passed over those political-economic “reproduction schemas” that Marx conceptualizes, and beds his vision down in the ideological reproduction of labor-power, in his own particular notion of ideology: “an imaginary representation of an individual’s real conditions of existence.” Consequently, in *The Urban Question*, Castells attacked urban studies precisely because of its ideological content. Erstwhile research on “the city,” he’d said, had formulated “imaginary representations,” framing the city in terms of “urban culture,” in narrow sociological and anthropological terms. Such approaches focus on “dimensions of the city,” on “densities,” on “size,” on the idea that the city exhibits a particular specificity, its own of organization and transformation; a logic which, Castells said, pays scant attention to broader dynamics of capitalist political-economic and social relations, particularly to their *reproduction*.

So in *The Urban Question* Castells said the urban isn’t really a unit of production at all; production operates at a bigger scale, at least on a regional scale and increasingly international stage. Production isn’t the right analytical entry point into the urban question. Rather, it is, à la Althusser, reproduction that counts most, the reproduction of the urban system and its links to the overall survival of capitalism. The urban, Castells insisted, typically awkwardly, is “a specific articulation of the instances of the social structure within a spatial unit of the reproduction of labor-power.”

From the mid-1970s onwards, around the time the Sex Pistols announced “NO FUTURE,” Castells began to define and refine his notion of the urban as the spatial unit of social reproduction by coining the concept “collective consumption”. Collective consumption is implicit in the reproduction of “unproductive” collective goods and services outside of the wage-relation, outside of variable capital, items like public housing and infrastructure, schools

and hospitals and collectively consumed services. “The essential problems regarded as urban are”, Castells said, “in fact bound up with the processes of ‘collective consumption’... That is to say, means of consumption objectively socialized, which, for specific historical reasons, are essentially dependent for their production, distribution and administration on the intervention of the state”.

And yet, what arose over the decade was an awkward predicament for progressive people, and for Marxist theoreticians: items of collective consumption so vital for reproduction of the relations of production, so vital for freeing up “bottlenecks” in the system, so vital for providing necessary (yet unprofitable) goods and services, so indispensable for propping up demand in the economy—were now being cast aside. How could this be? What once appeared essential ingredients for capitalism’s continued reproduction—for its long term survival—now turned out to be only contingent after all; the state began desisting from coughing up money for them; and soon, as the 1980s kicked in, would actively and ideologically wage war against them.

The Left has never really come to terms with the shock waves this earthquake engendered; the seismic tremor that registered big digits on the neoliberal Richter scale. The 1980s bid adieu to social democratic reformism, to an age when the public sector was the solution and the private sector the problem. The former now needed negating, pundits and ideologues maintained, required replacement by its antithesis; now the private sector was the solution and a shot and bloated public sector the problem. Managerial urbanization—when state bureaucrats dished out items of collective consumption through some principle of redistributive justice or vague notion of equality—had given way to an urbanization in which the *market* was the panacea. Writ large was the beginning of the privatization of everything, the outsourcing of democracy.

Thatcher’s assault on welfare provision and blatant class warfare created a generation of lazy entrepreneurs in Britain, capitalists who had no need to innovate or even become entrepreneurial because business was handed to them on a Tory silver platter. And those remaining urban managers no longer concerned themselves with redistributive justice; most wouldn’t even know what the phrase meant. Instead, their working day began to be passed applying cost-benefit analysis to calculate efficiency models, devising new business paradigms for delivering social services at minimum cost; services inevitably got contracted-out to low-ball bidders, and whole government departments were dissolved or replaced by new units of non-accountable “post-political”

middle-managers, whose machinations are about as publicly transparent as mud. *The Urban Question* was rapidly becoming an old urban question.

Maybe what was most entrepreneurial about the 1980s was the innovative way in which the private sector reclaimed the public sector, used the public sector to prime the private pump, to subsidize the reproduction of capital rather than the reproduction of people. Any opposition was systematically and entrepreneurially seen off, done in, both materially and ideologically. In 1986, Thatcher abolished a whole realm of regional government—the Metropolitan County Councils—at the same time as she bypassed municipal authorities (frequently Left and/or Labour-run) with a new species of urban growth machine: so-called *quangos*, alleged public-private partnerships, bodies like Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), which spearheaded London Docklands, as well as redevelopment of Liverpool's deindustrialized waterfront. By this time, though, I'd gone up to Oxford to do a PhD with the famous Marxist geographer David Harvey, who suggested I summarily went back down to Liverpool, back to its ruins and ruination, back to talk to Militant, back to look the negative in the face and tarry with it.

I've been tarrying with negativity since then, trying to convert it into something positive. Yet several decades on, after a lot of reading, a lot of talking and listening, after a lot of political hope and a fair bit of disillusionment, after a lot of wandering around the world, I finally got down to writing my own version of *Urban Question*, entitled, somewhat unoriginally, *The New Urban Question*. It's a short, polemical book, a hopeful book that nonetheless tries to cover a lot of ground. It goes back to the source in order to move through and beyond the times, our times right now, when any "Marxist approach" to the urban question demands hard answers; not least because now the dialectic of the urban as a site of capital accumulation and social struggle has changed. As the Thatcherite 1980s gave way to the Blairite late-'90s, and as it stands today, extended reproduction of capital is achieved through financialization and dispossession, through dispossession and reconfiguration of urban space. The urban is no longer an arena where value is created so much as extracted, gouged out of the common coffers, appropriated as monopoly rents and merchants' profits, as shareholder dividends and interest payments; the urban, nowadays, is itself exchange value. Quite recently, teaching a graduate class at Bartlett, as part of my visiting fellowship there, I tried to figure this dynamic out, with the aid of a synoptic diagram, conceived as follows:

	<b>CITY &amp; DYNAMICS OF CAPITAL ACCUMULATION (Reproduction of capital)</b>	<b>CITY AS ARENA OF SOCIAL &amp; CLASS STRUGGLE (Reproduction of relations of production)</b>
<b>1970s</b> (Castells' <i>The Urban Question</i> )	Predominance of primary circuit of industrial production; some secondary circuit investment (investment into real estate and property)	Social and class struggles at workplace (unemployment) and city-based "collective consumption" issues
<b>1980s</b>	Privatization, financialization and deregulation; investment flows into secondary circuit of capital (cf. Big Bang & London Docklands); mergers and acquisitions; quangos; Enterprise Zones	Social and class struggles at workplace (union bashing) and intensified city-based collective consumption issues (housing, poll tax, etc.) and regional democratic concerns (Metropolitan County Councils)
<b>1990s</b>	Financialization and <i>rentier</i> extraction (land rents and interest-bearing capital); Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs); accumulation by dispossession and repossession; shareholder capitalism	Urban-based global struggles around economic inequality (cf. Global Justice Movement, Seattle 1999); anti-WTO and IMF
<b>2000s (post 9/11)</b> ( <i>The New Urban Question</i> )	<i>Rentier</i> capitalism; secondary circuit of capital as fictitious capital; accumulation by dispossession; austerity; land grabs; predatory loans/parasitic extraction; creditocracy; parasitic mode of urbanization and "neo-Haussmannization"	Urban expression of democracy struggles, urban-based struggles against economic (neoliberal) authoritarianism and political authoritarianism (cf. Occupy); struggles against financial capital; debt resistor and anti-austerity struggles

In the table, I am really *periodizing* the urban as an accumulation strategy and seat of resistance against this accumulation strategy, placing each in a decadal dialogue. The column on the left emphasizes the reproduction of capital while the right one emphasizes social reproduction. We're essentially moving from Castells' 1970s era, when the urban found its definition as a spatial unit of collective consumption, to our era when the urban gets defined by new forms of predatory dispossession, by what I call in *The New Urban Question*, "the parasitic mode of urbanization", a process undergirding "neo-Haussmannization."

Now, insofar as risk management goes, insofar as addressing glitches within the overall reproduction of capital in the economy, the state is a *first* line of defense, a veritable executive committee for managing the common affairs of a bourgeoisie and aristocratic super-elite, stepping in at the first signs of crisis—baling out the bankrupted corporations, the too-big-to-fail financial institutions. One way it gets away with it is through "austerity governance", the latest form of ruling class manufactured consent, something fitting neatly with the material needs of those in state and economic power—the two are largely inseparable. Austerity enables parasitic predilections to flourish by opening up hitherto closed market niches; it lets primitive accumulation continue apace, condoning the flogging off of public sector assets, the free giveaways of land and public infrastructure, the privatizations, etc., all done in the name of cost control, of supposedly trimming bloated public budgets. What were once untouchable, non-negotiable collective use-values are now fair game for re-commodification, for snapping up cheaply only to resell at colossally dearer prices.

The net result, thirty years since my initial encounter with *The Urban Question*, is that collective consumption items have morphed into individualized consumption items. By this I mean that as the state has divested from its apparent systemic requirement to subsidize and fund public goods, as it has divested from its role of ensuring extended social reproduction, erstwhile public goods have become accessible to people only via the market, hence at a price. Thus people themselves willy-nilly pick up the tab of the price of social reproduction; we've taken care of our own lot, achieved it through borrowing money, self-reproducing as the private sector cashes in, quite literally at our expense. Returning, then, to the Castellian conundrum of how is it possible that the state can back away from funding collective consumption whilst ensuring the capitalist system continues to survive, we can answer this urban question quite categorically: via a *debt economy*.

According to a Bank of England *Financial Stability* report (November 2013), household debt in Britain has now soared to record levels. Individuals owe a total of £1.43 trillion. Families, we hear, are borrowing to deal with higher

costs of living, using credit finance to pay household bills. The bulk of the debt is in mortgages, which are steadily on the up, reflective of inflated house prices. The debt economy flourishes, both publically and privately, because it is at once profitable on supply and demand sides. On the one hand, cities experience budget cuts, workers get laid off, services cut, libraries and sports centers close, education funding is slashed; public facilities are sold off to private, for-profit interests, for-profit vultures who valorize knockdown price public infrastructure. Municipalities need to borrow money in order to raise money. Public services are then run and maintained by private interests, invariably declining in quality afterwards. On the other hand, people are compelled to pay more, more on council tax, more on education, more on healthcare, more on services that are now driven by accountancy exigencies rather peoples' real needs. It's no coincidence, then, that all those major items of collective consumption that Castells identified in the 1970s—education, housing, and health—are now items featuring on the ever-growing list of household debt burden. People are falling prey to predatory loan sharks to fund basic human needs.

Loan sharks complement the apparently paradoxical proliferation of subprime predatory loans, of lending money and mortgages to vulnerable people who can little afford to pay these loans or mortgages back. In the 1960s, poor people were denied credit, couldn't get bank loans and financial aid because they earned too little or lived in the wrong part of town; whole populations and neighborhoods, invariably minority populations and neighborhoods, were written off as high-risks, *redlined*, starved of financial aid for property ownership and small business development. One of the great popular American successes of this era was the implementation of the Community Reinvestment Act of 1971, outlawing redlining practices. Now, though, in a cruel twist of fate, in a savage contraflow, poor people can't get enough loans, frequently at exorbitant rates, with all kinds of hidden fees thrown in; the US's subprime mortgage bubble was hyper-inflated by predatory loans; its bursting necessitated housing foreclosures galore—3 million, in fact, between January 2007 and August 2010 alone—and repossessions by the lender offenders who're eventually bailed out by federal government.

For good reason do activist-scholars like Andrew Ross now stress how “capital owners in pursuit of profit have long moved beyond the workplace and into the ‘social factory’ of everyday life...the debt burden is felt more intimately than workplace exploitation, if only because it cannot be cordoned off as the contractual tie we owe to our employers”. Little wonder, too, that there's now a debt resisters' movement gathering steam. Citizens on both sides

of the Atlantic are striking out at this vulture capitalism in our midst, and are participating in a debtors' movement called "Rolling Jubilee". Organized by Occupy Wall Street's roving "Strike Debt" group, war hasn't just waged on the debt collector (US college tuition debt alone stands at \$1 trillion); it's also bailed out the people, raising \$600,000 to buy back a cool \$15 millions' worth of household debt, at a knockdown price on the secondary debt market (where bad debts are exchanged between wolves and sharks), a lot emerging from subprime mortgage foreclosures. Rolling Jubilee has liberated debt at the same time as highlighted the grand larceny and absurdity of our burgeoning debt economy.

Accompanying all this—to be sure, administering all this—mediating the dialectic between the reproduction of capital and social reproduction are accountants. Accountants somehow rule the political-economic roost in Britain. In the 1990s, we saw how their emergence involved nifty role switching, a certain morphing, revolving doors between accountants seconded into politics and politicians seconded into accountancy; and always the twain met over policy. Public welfare managerialism had somehow transmogrified into private welfare middle-managerialism. These days, accountants dominate the whole scene around so-called PFIs, or Private Finance Initiatives, the brainchild of John Major in 1992. PFIs have helped themselves to urban infrastructure—ports, roads, schools, railways, electricity grids, seemingly the entire National Health Service (NHS), and God knows what else—not only in Britain but throughout the world.

In 1997, Blair's inaugural Labour government was, on principle, dead against PFIs; a year or so on, they had a change of heart, realizing they were a principled government—indeed, they had many!—and soon began to peddle PFIs more gung-ho than even the Tories themselves. When the going's good, PFIs—government-sponsored private companies, managed by accountants with zero public accountability—amass considerable booty; when things go belly-up, the government steps in to bail them out because they serve a vital public necessity and can't go under. It's an all-win situation for everybody, apart from the ordinary taxpayer and consumer. Meantime, the big four accountancy firms—Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC)—have reputedly pocketed a cool billion pounds from their interests PFIs<sup>2</sup>.

Accountants have a massive and growing stake in the delivery and management of Britain's public services, though always back scene. Take Capita, a giant IT, cleaning and refuse collection subcontractor, a company that dominates municipalities' public services up and down the country. Ernst &

Young secures Capita's local authority contracts—in return for a fat commission. Capita was itself the brainchild of a former local authority accountant, Rod Aldridge, back in the deregulated 1980s. (The company has a £3 billion turnover with pre-tax profits for 2013 of £425 million.) In Birmingham, Capita's contract is worth £126 million a year, yet few councilors have a clue how that money is spent. The actual contract document, crammed with dense price structuring equations and abstruse financial calculations and projections, runs to over a thousand pages, and is purposefully complex—or so believes local Labour councilor John Clancy—incomprehensible to all but the savviest accountant. Capita's wheeling and dealings are shrouded in secrecy, utterly beyond public remit, let alone elected representatives. "I've lost control of the future," admits Clancy. Rest assured it's all in the hands of Ernst & Young. We can sleep well at night. Only one thing is less murky: Capita capitalizes on councils making drastic cuts to save millions of pounds each year.

This split *within* the state between time-served councilors like John Clancy and private sector-imposed technocrats reflects the kind of rift that French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identified as *left and right hands of the state*; a drama played out between, on the one hand, the left hand, a dwindling bunch of experienced politicians answerable to their constituents and who still try to uphold local democracy; and, on the other right hand, a "state nobility" of elite technocrats and cabinet plutocrats, finance ministers and public-private bankers who no longer even pretend to want to change anything significant. The rift marks an ever-widening cleavage between left-leaning rank-and-file representatives who care about the public, and right-leaning senior civil servants who care only about the private, about budgets and bank balances. On the left side, we have publicly-employed progressive councilors, social workers, community organizers, primary and secondary school teachers, health and housing officers, local government officials and progressive magistrates, care assistants and crèche workers; on the right side, we have a nobility of largely unaccountable agents propping up the upper-echelons of the Ministry of Finance and its regime of Accountancy Governance.

"This opposition," says Bourdieu in *Acts of Resistance* (1998), "between the long-term view of the 'enlightened elite' and the short-term impulses of the populace or its representatives is typical of reactionary thinking at all times and in all countries; but it now takes a new form with the state nobility, which derives its conviction of its legitimacy from academic qualifications and from the authority of science, especially economics. Not only by divine right, but also by reason and modernity does the movement of change lie on the side of these governors—the ministers or 'experts'; unreason and archaism,



inertia and conservatism are on the side of the people, the trade unions and critical intellectuals.” Bourdieu insists on the winning back of democracy from technocracy; the latter has “kidnapped” the state, he says, preached its withering away, made public goods a private fancy, the consumer the citizen. “We must put an end to the reign of ‘experts’ in the style of the World Bank and IMF,” says Bourdieu, “who impose without discussion the verdicts of the new Leviathan, the financial markets, and who do not seek to negotiate but to ‘explain’.” We must break with the historical inevitability, professed by the doyens of neoliberalism; “we must invent new forms of collective political work capable of taking note of necessities, especially economic ones, in order to fight them and, wherever possible, to neutralize them”.

How to reinvent the future of public services and restore a re-enlightened definition of what constitutes the public realm? Of housing and health, education and public transport, work and play—of collective consumption? “In the work of reinventing public services”, Bourdieu says, “intellectuals, writers, artists and scientists have decisive roles to play”. It is us who can help break “the monopoly of technocratic orthodoxy over the means of diffusion”; it is us who can “help draw up rigorous analyses and inventive proposals about the major questions that the orthodoxy of the media and politics makes it impossible to raise”.

If there is a job for radical urban research and politics—though who might fund it, I wonder?—it is to analytically and politically point the critical finger at this new nobility, of its select committee of accountants and administrators, the middle-managers who reside over our privatized public sector, and who pull the strings in our fast-emerging *rentier* and creditor society<sup>3</sup>. These managers fulfil public duties and undertake public roles, but do so within a more expansive and invasive private sector. They have become the right hand—and right turn—of the capitalist state. At a larger scale, we have a strange hybrid species of public-private sector bureaucrats, the nobility of Troika bureaucrats, the Euro technocrats and international *fonctionnaires*; not so much effete Euro MPs as indomitable European Central Bankers, for-profit public sector venture capitalists who determine the life-chances of Euro-crisis zones, of Greece especially. Here, let us cast our critical analytical and investigative eye over their doings, let us name names, make them accountable to “the people”; let us scrutinize their behind-close doors middle-management machinations, their austerity plans, expose their hidden ideological leanings.

Ditto those managers and accountants who preside over Moody’s or Standard & Poor and affect the life-chances and fortunes of whole cities and regions; their “specialist” financial opinions condition the credit worthiness of

metropolises, holding the latter hostage to global bond markets. One condition for getting the coveted Aaa long-term rating (or short-term “Prime-1” rating) is usually that the municipality applies the holy writ of accountancy governance, that it trims its budget, that it sells off the family silver, the city’s public infrastructure. Ditched assets have been gobbled up cheaply by another sort of manager, the Hedge Fund manager, who, after preying on wounded corporations over the past decade, now devotes predatory attention to wounded municipalities, especially across America, revalorizing the public domain for private gain. (Cogsville, a New York-based private equity firm, has been buying up fire sale and repossessed private properties across the US; in Chicago, notably in Portage Park, Cogsville is now effectively the neighborhood landlord. Meantime, Blackstone, another Big Apple Hedge Funder, owns large swaths of repossessed and knockdown housing stock in Phoenix).

Other types of managers lurk typically anonymously and unaccountably at the micro level, at the household level, a new kind of middle-managerial class and social gatekeeper. They determine peoples’ ability to get a mortgage, to rent a property, to get hooked up to utility services, to have an Internet provider, a mobile phone, a regular phone line—to have all the *accoutrements* you need to lead a regular life on planet earth. Indeed, these managers determine peoples’ entire financial and social life-chances because they prop up the numerous Credit Rating Agencies that assess our “credit worthiness”. Firms like Experian, Equifax and Callcredit are self-avowed “global information service companies” whose credit reports and scores, profiles and ranks predict a person’s present and future liability and ability to service a debt. Such credit agencies ensure the financial surveillance of everyday life. But they’re completely beyond public scrutiny, a law unto themselves, profiting in Britain because of hopelessly outdated regulation (The Consumer Credit Act of 1974).

We urgently need financial accountability and transparency around private sector middle-management and mismanagement. We need some citizens’ global registry of financial assets, together with a list of which accountants are cooking their books. We need greater democratic knowledge of who owns what, as well as who tots up the figures for those who own what. Something along these lines appears to be getting explored in suggestive ways with the “Citizens’ Audit,” an international network of local groups pressuring for an opening up of the state’s books, scrutinizing the shenanigans of shadowy accountants and the partisan administrators therein. It’s a program warranting consolidation so that widespread audits might be conducted by ordinary people—not by professional accountants already on the payroll of those they’re meant to be auditing—restoring democratic accountability around

common resources and public assets, while there's still some left. Struggling for democracy means loosening the diktat those anonymous, unaccountable, behind-closed-doors middle-managers have over our culture, those in both the private and public sector, those bankers and accountants, technocrats and creditocrats who orchestrate the financial repossession of our society. Breaking this mediating and obfuscating link implies struggling against the massively complex bureaucracies that rule over us. To do so we need to redouble mass civil disobedience, insist upon transparency around public affairs, and link *institutional investigation* with *insurrectional outrage*.

Resistance to the dominant order must somehow hook up the inside of the public realm to the outside; "official" representatives in government, in the council chambers, must be kept on with their toes by shouts in the street, by direct action democracy, by a social movement exerting its pressure from without, in the civic squares, in the alternative media, across clandestine airwaves, in the citizens' agora, forcing the right side of the state to respond to the left side. This may even give the subdued left side the courage to step out of the shadows cast by the right side, prompting it to come out of the council closet, emerge again into the accountable public light of the day. Meanwhile, probing researchers—inside and outside the university—can ally themselves with militant activists, transforming themselves into probing militants and activist researchers, vocalizing joint dissent in brainy and brawny ways.

Along the way, this alliance might also want to consider the degree to which Manuel Castells' vision of the urban still lives on. Indeed, Castells' idea of the urban as a unit of "collective consumption" continues to say bundles, although not so much as an analytical category as a *normative construct*: the urban *ought to be* an arena characterized by collective use-values, by goods and services consumed in common, consumed by a public, by "the people"; the urban *ought to be* a form of human sociability, a collectivity, beyond any kind of profit logic, beyond speculative exchange-values; the urban *ought to be* a site for social reproduction, a space where people can freely encounter one another, under circumstances in which a different, non-marketized definition of value prevails. Here we might heed Oscar Wilde, who remarked that a cynic knows the price of everything yet the value of nothing. Over the past few decades, we've had lots of cynics in our midst, lots speculators and rentiers, lots of administrators and middle-mangers who seem to know the price of everything, obsessively and cynically calculating the price of public culture; but they sneer at the real value of things. We, on the Left, need to affirm another value yardstick, free from the cynics' speculative grip, another form of human solidarity, one that might enrich urban life beyond wealth.

## Endnotes

- 1 Interestingly, when Christopher Lasch wrote *Minimal Self* in 1984, Pynchon's *Vineland* wasn't yet published. But what Lasch said about other Pynchon books that had appeared—*Crying of Lot 49*, *V.*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*—equally holds for *Vineland*: "Pynchon's ambitious but intentionally inconclusive novels dramatize the difficulty of holding the self together in a world without meaning or coherent patterns, in which the search for patterns and connections turns back on itself in tightening solipsistic circles... as Pynchon implies, the only feasible alternative to paranoia seems to be resigned acceptance of irreversible decline: the gravity that pulls everything irresistibly down into nothingness".
- 2 The accountancy profession seems to single-handedly manage Britain's NHS; it's hard to keep track of those spinning doors, between private plunder and public health. In 2002, a PWC accountant, Simon Leary, got seconded to head up strategy at the Department of Health. Once on the inside, Adrian Masters, another PWC man, followed him, becoming Director of the Health Team at Blair's Delivery Unit. Masters has since gone on to run the health service regulator, Monitor, illustrating how even the regulators need regulating—just as Marx thought the educators needed educating! In 2009, moving in the opposite direction, Gary Belfield, Head of Commissioning at the Department of Health (under Gordon Brown), joined KPMG, soon followed by his former colleague at the Department of Health, Mark Britnell; the latter is now hotly tipped to return inside the government and head of the NHS.
- 3 Such an intellectual project would need to put a new spin on sociologist Ray Pahl's old "urban managerialism" thesis. Now we need its beefed up "urban middle-managerialist" counterpart. Those public sector managers that Pahl pinpointed back in the 1970s, who gate kept scarce housing, education and health resources, now conspire as private sector bureaucrats who affect the whole allocative process around public goods and services—and hence the "life chances" of ordinary people everywhere. This is what Pahl said in *Whose City?* and which still holds with respect to those urban middle-managers: "We need to know not only the rates of access to scarce resources and facilities for given populations but also the determinants of the moral and political values of those who control these rates. We need to know how the basic decisions affecting life-chances in urban areas are made... The controllers of the urban system seem to control more completely than the controllers of the industrial system."





19

ΑΓΟΝΑΣ  
ΓΙΑ ΟΛΙΚΗ  
ΑΠΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΩΣΗ



NOVAS NICK TRAVEL



# **V. DEVALUING LABOUR DEPRECIATING LAND**

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# Devaluing Labour, Depreciating Land

## Section Opening

by Dimitris Dalakoglou

**T**he most recent developmental and ‘modernising’ boom in Athens and Greece started in the early 1990s and peaked with the Olympic Games of 2004. Behind the shiny lights of shopping malls, the brand new infrastructures and the urban growth of the period hid an enormous privatisation project of public and common land. Ten years later, during the ‘crisis’, this project takes the form of widespread land-grabbing by private companies, as Costis Hadjimichalis analyses in the opening of the section.

At the same time, other neoliberal strategies such as flexible—and therefore devalued—labour were immaculately rehearsed during that pre-Olympic period, thanks to the major public works that supposedly had to be built quickly, for the sake of the big event. The absolute devaluation of labour was best signified through the eighteen workers killed in the building sites of the Olympic infrastructures. The modern and developed Greece required new materiality—and so, the construction sector saw enormous profits in the 1990s and through the 2000s. The sector’s employment practices (underpayment, zero safety for workers, temporality and precariousness) are generalised and exemplified now, at the time of crisis.

Yet it is also true that during the 1990s and 2000s, a great proportion of the country’s population did buy into the ideas of so-called ‘modernisation’, ‘Europeanization’, and so on. With the aid of corporative media, economic growth was elevated to the dominant ideology of the country. Consumerism saw unprecedented peaks, while any voices critical to the neoliberal fiesta were ignored or outright suppressed. This condition produced a silent majority ready to sacrifice everything social movements had achieved through a century of struggles. As David Harvey explains further in the section, such processes were ideal for alienating people not only from their labour and its product, but from their own position within the production process and their political collective and individual selfhood.

What is reflected today through the case of Athens is a new stage of capitalist history being shaped in Western Europe—and further beyond. The post-WWII social provisions—that ostensible break in the history of European capitalism—are being replaced by a brutal form of governance. However, as Filippo Osella tells us, the message coming from that Global South is that the process of devalued labour has far from ended. The overarching question of this panel, as framed by Bob Caterall, is—simply and complicatedly enough—*what is to be done?* David Harvey sets a departing point for that discussion, proposing that we first acknowledge the consequences of alienation before we discuss the overcoming of the system that produces it.



Crisis and Land Dispossession<sup>1</sup>

by Costis Hadjimichalis

**T**he debate around land and unearned incomes that derive from it returns with a vengeance in national and international headlines alike: not as some remnant of archaic relationships, but as what is at stake in face of the new investment options imposed by financial capitalism—sometimes through real estate investments and other times through the violent dispossession of thousands of hectares of land around the world. Let us not forget that the crisis we experience today in the global North, in Southern Europe and in Greece, commenced from precarious investments in land and from the housing bubble in the USA. The exploitation of land, but also of natural elements linked to it—such as water, forests, the subsurface and biodiversity—nowadays comprise investment targets for local and international speculative capital at some unprecedented extent, intensity and geographical spread; an operation that is nevertheless difficult to discern, since it is not systematically accounted for, in the global South in particular. Nevertheless, NGOs and progressive research centres have located hundreds of cases that strongly resemble three well-known Greek examples.

In Chalkidiki, from 2010 on, local communities have been resisting the transformation of their land into an open cast gold extraction mine for the Canadian company Eldorado Gold, following an internationally increasing interest in extractions (known as *extractivism*, see Velegrakis, 2013). Chalkidiki is known for its wonderful beaches, which attract millions of visitors from around the world. Yet it is also historically known for its gold and silver extraction

mines—and from 1950 up to the present date, consecutive companies continue the extraction of gold in caves; despite numerous environmental problems, mining activity was tolerated by local communities, as it created employment locally. Yet the present case is different. The Greek government, hungry for foreign investment, agreed to long-term contracts for the exploitation of the deposits for a ludicrously small sum—ceding 317.000 stremmata (31.000 ha), ignoring both the devastating impact upon the environment and the health of the residents from the open cast mining. These irreversible and negative consequences have mobilised thousands of residents who protested, tried to occupy the premises of the company, clashed with the Riot Police, all the time while villages encountered tear-gas for the first time and while tens of school pupils were accused of being “terrorists” (Avgi, 4.2.14).

At the other end of the country, in southern Crete’s Cape Sidero, a large stretch of land of approximately 25.000 stremmata (2.500 ha) is targeted by the English company Itanos Gaia (ex-Loyalward) for the creation of combined tourist units which, according to the initial proposal, would include luxury hotels with a capacity of up to 7.000 beds; three golf courses; a conference centre; two marinas and a large number of summer residences, which will be made available through leasing and time sharing. The investment was originally announced in the mid-1990s; it had been supported by all governments since, yet it has faced strong opposition by parts of the local population, by the Left and by Greek and international environmental organisations—and it was eventually cancelled following appeals to the Constitutional Court in 2010. Today, it returns under a new name, *Itanos Gaia*, with 1.936 beds and a single golf course, but with the same area and the insertion in legislation of large-scale investments put forward under the so-called ‘fast-track’ regime—allowing, that is, limited regulations and controls. The area of the investment comes under the disputed ownership of Moni Toplou, the monastery that had conducted the negotiations with the English company at the first place. It includes the renown palm forest of Vai, while its largest part is under a status of archaeological and environmental protection, since it is a NATURA 2000 area (Melissourgios, 2008).

At the coastal front of Attica, the area of 6.200 stremmata (620 ha) that includes the old airport of Elliniko and the Agios Kosmas beach is being advertised as the largest urban plot in the Mediterranean—with some formidable building facilities. It comprises the jewel in the crown of the privatisation program being materialised as part of Greece’s commitments through the Memoranda. A key role in the readjusted institutional system is held by the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), while a

special law was introduced setting land uses and building regulations for the drafting of the *Plan of Integrated Development of the Metropolitan Pole of Elliniko and Agios Kosmas*.

The airport ceased to operate in 2001; some permanent Olympic facilities were constructed in the area since, which remain inactive up to the present date—even though neighbouring municipalities have protested this. Despite the lucratively low price tag placed by the state, and despite the numerous development plans and potentially monopolistic location of this area, Elliniko has attracted only a handful of investors—out of which Lamda Development, which belongs to the Latsis ship-owning family, made an offer of 75 euros/sq.m. The offer was accepted by the HRADE, even though neighbouring plots of land have an objective land value of 1.100 euros/sq.m. On the other hand, the neighbouring municipalities, tens of organisations and initiatives and the Left have all been resisting and mobilising by all means against the privatisation and the cutting off of free access to the shore by future “investors” (Vatavali & Zifou, 2013).

Similar examples at even larger scales exist everywhere around the world. The violent interventions of large international companies in Latin America and in Africa aimed at the grabbing of cultivatable land, water and biodiversity from the locals are well-known—and they are just like the colonialists used to do. In southern Asia and in Polynesia, luxury tourist complexes assert exclusive claims over vast coastal areas and small islands, violently replacing the traditional economy. Real estate investments surpass even the wildest of imagination in the Emirates of the Gulf, which compete with one another in the creation of luxury, unashamed constructions in the middle of the desert. And in Europe, one only need take a careful look at London, Paris or Berlin to locate the importance of land and property in the attraction of investments.

In the western Mediterranean, the tourist prototype of the combined unit including real estate and golf facilities—just like the one at the Toplou monastery—with the aid of scandalous spatial policies by local regional authorities, has grabbed vast areas of cultivatable land and water resources and has contributed to the present housing bubble in Spain. In the countries of the formerly existing socialism such as Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, we see the contemporary violence exercised for the privatisation of land, both urban and agrarian<sup>2</sup>. In ex-Eastern Germany in particular, privatisations are materialised by Treuhand, a company whose coordinator was Wolfgang Schäuble, a person well-known to us by now<sup>3</sup>. The experience of Treuhand has crucially inspired the founding and the operation of the HRADE in Greece.

I approach the previous examples as land dispossession because they outline a *shrewd act that takes place through violence and deceit*. In the case of land, what is of utmost importance is the status of social relationships and the balance of class and political forces that define, at any given historical period, the relationship of the society in question with that land.

In the pre-capitalist period, land dispossession was synonymous to the violent enclosure of common areas by landowners and feudal power. These common areas included crop fields, forests, lakes and rivers used in common by the landless—and whose violent enclosure therefore deprived them from access to common resources necessary for their survival—such as the produce of cultivation, the prey, the produce of the forests, water, etc.

In certain parts of the global South today—and despite the collaboration of national governments—one could use the notion of the enclosure of common land for the violent interference of international or national companies, for the purposes of extractions, deforestations, mass cultivations, etc. In these areas, capitalist relationships have not fully developed and/or there is no detailed recording of property. In the global North, the development of capitalist relationships and the operation of cadasters has safeguarded the individual/private and public ownership of land; there is no longer any “common land” in the sense this used to have before, and enclosure as a notion may now only be used indirectly.

The grabbing of private land takes place from one private entity at the expense of another private one, and falls under civil law. The grabbing of private land may exist even in cases of compulsory, unfair dispossession for the benefit of the public or for private entities, under the pretext of productive investments, when these take place for a demeaning fee. We are also aware of violent and vindictive state forfeiture of the property of communists both during and after the end of the Spanish and Greek civil wars—while the confiscation of real estate belonging to Jews during nazism and fascism was also widespread.

In Greece, the most important target of dispossession is public land when (a) there exists unauthorised and illegal occupation, building on and use of public areas; (b) when transactions of public land take place (selling, allocation or lease) under terms and fees that cause loss to citizens; when public land, building, infrastructures and services are privatised and (d) when institutions are altered or formed to facilitate the trespassing, privatisation or selling off of public land (declassification of protected areas/buildings, change in land uses, decrease in the thresholds of land segmentation, etc).

Greek and international examples set out the questions that have led me to write the book of which this text is part of the introduction: the quest for the thread connecting on the one hand, the strong interest in land investments

after 2000—and on the other, financial capital and neoliberal policies the world over; where and how such land grabbings take place, and what the role of land may be in crisis-ridden Greece. The last question may also be the most important one.

From 2009 on, the crisis in Greece has decisively contributed to the devalorization/depreciation of the exchange value of land, decreasing monetary values by 15-30%—depending on the area—when compared to the 2005 prices. The special status imposed as of 2010 forms a lucrative environment for speculators-investors, dramatically altering the legal, constitutional order and imposing something of a protectorate status upon the country.

Consequences on everyday life, with the 1,5 million of unemployed, with the collapse of public health and education, with the constant lay-offs and wage and pension decreases are all “justified” by the ruling classes as a price that is necessary to pay in order for Greece to exit the crisis. This irrational domestic devaluation, leading to the reproduction of recession, keeps the matter of public land and real estate dispossession afloat in public news and debates, as some supposed solution for the paying off of public debt—which however happens to increase, instead of decreasing. Hundreds of examples from across all of the country’s peripheries, apart from the three aforementioned ones in this text, tell the same story. The areas grabbed may be smaller than corresponding ones in the global South, yet they comprise an application of the same international practices, adjusted to Greek society’s local characteristics.

According to the Troika analysts, Greece experiences some “delayed mobility” of land values when compared to the rest of Europe—and a “normalisation” of the “Greek exception” is therefore required. Land and real estate must therefore follow the path of what has happened in the rest of Europe: privatisation of large public areas, land ownership centralisation and curtailing of small ownerships, an “obligatory capitalist modernisation”, according to the supporters of the Memoranda. And when the above are combined with the forthcoming opening-up of auctions of houses and shops, the increase of taxation and the selling off of the rights of “red” mortgages from banks to third parties (to specialised international hedge funds), then an explosive mix is formed with unforeseen social and political consequences. The people who lost out from the devalorization/devaluation of the exchange value of their land and real estate due to the crisis may now possibly lose their use value itself—that is, their homes.

We therefore stand witness to an unprecedented attack taking place at many different levels; what is at stake here is land and, at another level, the building stock—primarily public buildings, commercial real estate and residencies. What had been won through generations—materially,

institutionally but symbolically also—is now lost over a small amount of time, through the dispossession of land, of public property and of small ownership alike.

It was Marx who had analysed land dispossession through the enclosure of the commons by landowners during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and through primitive accumulation, while the notion was also developed—on different levels—by Rosa Luxemburg and the anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin. The dispossession of land and common resources associated with it was the driving force behind colonialism, and it is nowadays reproduced in a number of different ways. Earlier on, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) had referred to land dispossession and to unearned income deriving from it, as has the economist Michael Hudson in many of his books, including recently (2010). Among those who extensively refer to it are geographers such as David Harvey; agro-economists and sociologists such as White, Borras, and others (2012); ecologists such as Gouson and Fletcher (...) and “autonomous” marxists who propose a contemporary application of the theory of the commons and enclosures, such as Hardt and Negri (2009), de Angelis (2010) and others. In the international bibliography, the term used is “land grabbing”—while Harvey (2010, 2012) uses the term “land dispossession”.

Land dispossession in Greece, however did not commence with the crisis—and it shall not end with the exit from the Memoranda. It comprises a timeless characteristic of Greek society, with the thousands of grabbings of public land by individuals, businesses, the church, monasteries and municipalities through all sorts of illegal constructions, the invocation of non-existing ownership titles and the timelessly severely lacking interest in the safeguarding of public interest in public property. Grabbings of public land and public space take place at multiple scales: from the large areas used for extraction and illegal quarries, tourist real estate with golf courses and the infringement of seashores, all the way to the illegal woodland clearing for cultivation, the thousands of illegal constructions, the occupation of squares and pedestrian streets by restaurant and café tables and chairs, or the extension of our garden wall at the neighbour’s expense. These tactics enjoy an extended presence all over Greece and affect political mentalities and the everyday behaviours of citizens and authorities alike, at all levels. They also affect, however, the development and planning of Greek cities—with the constant legalisation of illegal constructions and the stretching of city plans, with a parallel attempt to put to order previously dispossessed areas. The status of land dispossession in Greece changed dramatically, and enjoyed a renewed boost from the 1990s on, with the country’s “modernisation” governments and the 2004 Olympiad—and



following the 2009 crisis in particular; all of these connected local processes of capital accumulation with the global hegemony of financial capitalism.

This short book—to which this text will act as an introduction—was written heatedly in the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014, in parallel with the developments of that time. Here, I try to trace the continuities and ruptures in land grabbing processes, particularly focusing on the international and domestic developments after 1980. I am aware of the difficulties of the project and I warn demanding readers that they shall not hereby find any thorough historical analysis and documentation of land grabbing neither internationally nor in Greece. The book's aim is different: it is to reignite interest on matters of land and land rent; to connect them with the new terms set by global sovereignty of financial capital and to relate them to the present international conjuncture of the financial and social crisis. More than anything, it aims to reveal the key role of land—materially as well as symbolically—at multiple scales: from restaurant tables (occupying pavements) to coastal tourism, all the way to the mines of Chalkidiki.

Under the present conditions of the country's total deprecation (financial, geographical, social, political and moral) there are two main valuable resources targeted for exploitation/grabbing by lenders and speculators alike: the educated young generation and land. The appropriation of surplus value from the excellently educated youth happens through unemployment and migration: apart from the extraction of surplus from their specialised labour, their places of reception and their employers additionally have no expense as a society—since they have not paid a single euro for the cost of social reproduction of the thousands of doctors, nurses, engineers, artists, lawyers, social workers and so many others already residing and working at the lender-countries<sup>4</sup>. Land, the subject of this book, is of course immobile and the crisis contributes to the devalorization/depreciation of its exchange value, while the special conditions that we suffer are necessary in order for its dispossession to take place *in situ*, at such an unprecedented scale and in such a small time-frame, by Greek and foreign capital alike.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Excerpt from the volume by Costis Hadjimichalis (2014) *Crisis and Land Dispossession*, to be released in Greek in the fall of 2014.
- 2 See the very interesting study: *Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles in Europe*, *Hands off the Land*, European Coordination via Campesina, April 2013.
- 3 At the time when he was president of Treuhand, Mr Schäuble was shot and seriously wounded by a German citizen who had lost their job and house due to the privatisations; an attempted assassination that grounded Schäuble in a wheelchair. Thanks to Ares Kalandides for this piece of information.
- 4 Also see the well-documented and up-to-date book by Lois Lamprianidis, *Investing in Flight*, 2011 (in Greek).

## What is to be Done? Redefining, Re-Asserting and Reclaiming Land, Labour and the City

(Draft notes, drawing on work in progress)

by Bob Catterall

### A. What is to be done? Epigraphs and Epitaphs

**1** '[A]ll that remains for the socialist, as such is... to conduct propaganda solely among the urban workers, while these workers will be continually drowned in the peasant mass which... will be thrown on to the streets of the large towns in search of a wage'.

2. 'It's a thing that can fire one's energies over a whole lifetime'.

3. 'We were right'.

4. 'Forget the West!'

5. 'Our task is to open up a theoretical terrain wherein Afghan women can demonstrate openly against Islamist laws that would fetter their autonomy. Without this action being sucked into the ruling hegemony of the West. We will not succeed if we continue to read only Western writers or only writers from the non-west who enter into our debates on our terms. It will not happen if we remain within the comfort zone of any civilisation into which we have been born'.

**6. ‘How does a global financial crisis permeate the spaces of the everyday in a city?... “Privatised” explores the legacy of mass privatisation projects that preceded the 2004 Olympics, placing them in the context of present day privatisation schemes. “Devalued” gazes at the ever-shrinking spaces of migrants in the city and the devaluation of their lives that comes as a result. “Militarised” shows how, in face of the crisis, this devaluation turns into a generalised condition.**

7. ‘GREEN SHOOTS, DEAD ROOTS. Austerity has worked apparently. House prices are soaring and George Osborne is proclaiming that the British economy is thriving. But look below the surface and it’s a very different story...’

8. ‘You wanted to know my name, but I have no name other than what I appear to be... You’ve seen who I am. There is nothing greater than mankind and womankind. I am she who appears before you, who loves and is loved’.

The quotations above are at this stage deliberately unattributed so as to encourage thought about them and their possible interaction. Their authors and sources and their possible significances will be introduced in their presentation at the conference. For the curious/and or impatient all but 3, 6 and 7 will be found in the extract below and conference goers should be able to identify 6.

B. ‘Towards the Great Transformation: (11) Where/what is culture in ‘Planetary Urbanisation’? Towards a new paradigm’.

[Extract from a draft for the next article in a series appearing in *City*.  
Endnotes and references are minimal in this version]

#### *Abstract*

The present dominant paradigm in much writing on ‘planetary urbanisation’ with its exclusive emphasis on ‘the urban’ and consequent neglect/denial of ‘the rural’, thereby of the planet itself, and its minimal deployment of the humanities, reflects the somewhat ramshackle condition of urban studies and socio-spatial sciences *with their uncritical and under-theorised notion of interdisciplinarity (sometimes incorrectly labelled recently as transdisciplinarity)*. *Where and what is the planet itself in much of the work on ‘planetary urbanisation’? Where featured at all it is reduced to dehumanised and apparently nonsentient (mainly male) actants.* It cannot do justice to the nature of life on the planet and therefore cannot provide an adequate account or critique of planetary urbanisation. It is, in fact,

in danger of becoming an accomplice in that imperial(ist) project. An alternative paradigm, outlined here, is one in which the biosocial and gendered nature of culture, including its relationship to agriculture and 'the rural', is central to its explorations of the full geo-spatial field and their implications for action.

*To achieve justice with and for sentient beings and the planet, that misrepresented biosocial entity has, first, to be earthed, materialised, gendered, and cultured. (subsequent episodes reconsider the city in this neglected context and then science as partly normative notions). This series, developing a multidimensional, transdisciplinary (rather than interdisciplinary) approach, providing some necessary infilling and new/old orientations to the now outmoded paradigm, sets out a claim for this new paradigm for the biospatial sciences and the humanities*

*It seeks, in this episode drawing particularly on Marx's studies of the Russian commune and beyond (in space and time), Chernyshevski's work, particularly his novel *What Is To Be Done?*, and earlier work in the series, to contribute to the identification of a partly agrarian and fully 'encultured' path to the reclamation of the now acutely over-urbanised planet.*

Continuing, then, with the apparently fanciful and playful, there is Marx's mole as 'discovered' by Keiller's 'Robinson', as a plant, an apparently animate lichen who/which is 'becoming animal' as a mole (Deleuze's preference was for a serpent). An exceptionally literate animal, the mole/lichen is perhaps – to extend the fanciful and playful approach—engaged in a still heretical reading of the agrarian dimension in the last phase of Marx's work. Such a reading in these pages has included the work on ecologies of the significantly extra-mural intellectual-activist Guattari, of a philosophically-inclined naturalist, David Abram, engaged in grounding Deleuze's talk of 'becoming animal', of a sorely victimised Soviet poet Osip Mandelstam seeking to understand the promise and horror of both the Russian revolution and revolution itself (a task currently aided by Badiou's re-reading of communism) through the horror and imperilled promise of a vertebrate creature, both victim and possible hero, and of a young Palestinian writer, Nasser Abourahme, seeking to understand the promise, waywardness and horror of the current Egyptian revolution.

The move from Badiou's emphasis on the crucial importance of the communist experience to revolt and revolutions in an area where Islam is powerful in one sense endorses Susan Buck-Morss's<sup>1</sup> definition of the truly radical task:

Our task is to open up a theoretical terrain wherein Afghan women can demonstrate openly against Islamist laws that would fetter their autonomy. Without this action being sucked into the ruling hegemony of the West. We will not succeed if we continue to read only Western writers or only writers

from the non-west who enter into our debates on our terms. It will not happen if we remain within the comfort zone of any civilisation into which we have been born (80).

Abourahme's understandably impatient response to this latter tendency was 'Forget the West!' But extending Buck-Morss's insight now to any civilisation in which we have been schooled, directly or indirectly, one needs to hold on to both ends of this journey and keep travelling between and beyond them. The communist experience is not within 'the comfort zone' of our civilisation. In many ways it 'went wrong', disastrously wrong, but it has also been distorted and 'disappeared.' This episode in the series makes a small contribution to rescuing an early phase of the communist, and overlapping communalist, experience from its burial by neoliberalism, and the Marxist tradition from its burial by various brands of 'Marxist' and non-Marxist orthodoxy restoring it, not uncritically, to but also beyond 'the disciplines' and eventually to transdisciplinarity.

In seeking to understand the neglected sources of these two (perhaps, in a sense, significantly successive) 'modern' revolutions, communist and 'Arab', the anarchistic lichen/mole may find herself/himself returning not only to some natural/ cultural/intellectual roots of the original Soviet experiment, but also to a sense of the need to acknowledge the wholeness of the dismembered being(s) and smashed vertebration not just of communist victims but also of those struggling for transformation within the heartlands and peripheries of capitalism, seeking to oppose and supersede the massive human and planetary dismemberments already imposed and now accelerating under 'the status quo' of neoliberal capitalism and attendant academic disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Also aware, like Mandelstam, of the need for welding, the mole/lichen may well have a vision of *geo-social* transformation.

One postpositivist, but sadly as yet non-paradigmatic, interpretation of planetary urbanisation, properly literary/humanistic at one stage, that of Merrifield, deploys, following Lefebvre, the science fiction of a writer, Asimov, vastly curious but submerged in the physical sciences and in urban isolation<sup>2</sup>, matched in the hands of others (for whom he is not responsible) by the presentation of a somewhat tarnished image of the city-planet of Trantor in which the people are pulled, to use Mandelstam's words, into 'captivity/In order to begin a new world'.

The temptation, shared by most mainstream contemporary commentators and historically and currently by some anarchists, is to blame such negative/negated projects on Marx and/or Marxism and/or the revolutionary spirit and its various manifestations. Some parts of the story

have, though, to be retold. As Kropotkin for example, as noted by Atkinson, undertook the significant studies in the 1880s, later published in *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow* (1899), Marx was no longer, if he ever was, the dismissive critic of 'rural idiocy' (idiocy is not an accurate translation of the term used, and the remark refers both to a specific situation and specific circumstances)<sup>3</sup> nor had he ever been dismissive of cultural criticism and activity.

By the 1880s he had learned Russian, studied Russian cultural and socio-economic affairs, including agriculture, met and corresponded with members of the Russian intelligentsia, and was involved in theoretical and practical debates about Marxism that were to influence the revolution in a positive sense that cannot be reduced to the purely negative dimension exclusively asserted by contemporary apologists for the increasingly destructive 'status quo' of neoliberal capitalism as characteristic of 'communism' and indeed communalism, of any plans that they see as a threat to their profit margins and expectations. He had also, as shown below, sought to extend advanced Western intellectual and empathic horizons towards historically foundational and spatially global roots and routes.

One may discover, then, in late Marx (with some commonality with but also divergences from Engels) and some anarchism, crucial intellectual preoccupations, insights and resources for a transdisciplinary paradigm. The range of the work of late Marx—its holistic implications and tendency should be emphasised—has been indicated by John Bellamy Foster<sup>4</sup> who points to

the more familiar work on the origins of the family, private property and the state with its less familiar connection to 'the revolution in ethnological time that began in 1859'

'concerns about the development of agriculture, that is, the long-term relation to the soil'

and 'about the direction of Russian development'

'the roots in historical development of the materialist conception, which needed now to be extended back before ancient Greece, before written history, before philological analysis'

the attempt 'to break out of the literature of colonialism, through which he had been compelled to view the development of the rest of the world...'

But such work is effectively crucial only if it is conducted and read in the light of scientific, cultural, communal/communist, 'womanist'<sup>5</sup> struggles, *agrarian* as well as urban contexts—reversing the present myopic and exclusionary urban perspectives of much socio-spatial academic work, including 'planetary

urbanisation', and established political priorities)—in late nineteenth Russia, but now worldwide.

Seeking to do justice to do such struggles, previous episodes of this series located those aspects of the planet at best marginalised by much work on 'planetary urbanisation', instead earthing the planet, revisiting aspects of it, the soil, music/art, spring, birth, love, hope and fear, the lichen, the wild-flowering earth, in fact its culture.

*'...Citizen, how interested are we in Your opinion'*

A major link, symbolic and actual, between these two dimensions, is an appeal in 1881 from the Russian revolutionary activist Vera Zasulich—who had shot in 1878 (without killing) the St Petersburg governor for flogging a prisoner, and in a great political trial had been acquitted—to Marx in February 1881 asking his opinion about the destinies of the Russian rural commune: *'...Citizen, how interested are we in Your opinion'* (VZ to KM, 16 Feb, 1881—p 98-99).

Marx clearly had great difficulty in answering. It should be pointed out that his drafts were not just a theoretical exercise. They provide elements of a comprehensive and relatively detailed consideration of internal and external aspects of the Russian commune.

He wrote four drafts, amounting to twenty printed pages, in February and early March, replying with a five paragraph letter on 8 March. His two concluding sentences provide a succinct conclusion: *'...the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia. But in order that it might function as such, the harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development'* (124).

The first sentence and the latter half of the second one are challenging. The utmost importance is attributed to the qualitative dimension and promise, including *'spontaneous development'*, of the commune. But then the harmful influences are seen to threaten that promise:

What threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither a historical inevitability nor a theory; it is state oppression, and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the state has made powerful at the peasants' expense. (p. 104-5)

How had the positive part of Marx's conclusion—*'social regeneration', 'spontaneous development'*—come about and how could it subsequently disappear, be *'disappeared'*? This is a major question relating particularly to later developments after 1900, the endpoint of the present stage of this



analysis. Within this period Marx has pointed, above, to state oppression combined with capitalist oppression. Within and beyond this period Theodor Shanin—in his seminal collection (seminal both for Marx’s developing analysis and prognostication and as an example of mature sociological enquiry), *The Late Marx and the Russian Road*—points to a number of crucial positive and negative forces within the wider movement: ‘It had been no accident that it was from Russia and the Russians that Marx learned new things about global ‘unevenness’, about peasants and about revolution, insights which would be valid in the century still to come. The triple origin of Marx’s thought suggested by Engels—German philosophy, French socialism and British political economy—should in truth be supplemented by a fourth one, that of Russian revolutionary populism.

All that is easier to perceive when looked at late in the twentieth century, but the massive brainwashing of interpretation initiated by the Second International is still powerful enough to turn it into a “blind spots” (p.20).

Shanin’s analysis has been challenged by Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan ( whose essay is reproduced in Shanin’s book), as ‘special pleading with a vengeance’ (*The Late Marx and the Russian Road*, p80) and by Jim Heartfield:

‘Marx was dependent on Chernyevsky as a source for his writings on the Russian commune. Chernyevsky exaggerated the extent of the survival of communal landownership, as Lenin later showed in *On Capitalist Development in Russia*. In practical terms the peasants did not constitute a secure basis for the revolution..

But Marx did not claim that the peasants constituted a secure basis. He noted (see above) that the peasantry were threatened but nevertheless promising.

For Nicholai Chernyshevski’s view I turn here to a particularly seminal example of the other dimension of this account, Russian communal experience, imaginings and writings, in this case the world portrayed and examined in his work but particularly his novel, ‘What is to be done?’ (1863) and its massive subsequent influence. It is here that we come most evidently to aspects of culture neglected by ‘properly’ professional urbanists and socio-spatial analysts: the flowers, birdsong, ‘heroes’ of various kinds, elements that we have so far touched on, and now, additionally, a ‘heroine’ (Vera Pavlovna), a goddess, dreams, a palace, and hints of a civilisation organised on a different basis.

*'What is to be done?'*

Vera touched Pavlovna has a dream...

The field glimmers with a golden tint; the meadow is covered with flowers; and hundreds upon thousands of blossoms unfold on bushes surrounding the meadows. The forest that rises up behind grows greener, whispers, and is decked out in bright flowers... Birds flutter in the branches of the trees, their thousands of voices float down from above with all the fragrances... 'At the foot of the mountains, on the outskirts of the forest, amidst the bushes flowering in tall, thick avenues, a palace looms up. (360-361)

The palace looms up as Vera and a goddess fly towards it. At this point, the curious social or sociospatial scientist/reader may find, if he gets that far, that his 'willing suspension of disbelief' somewhat challenged. A dream, flowers, a forest, bird song, mountains, a palace, a goddess flying with the 'heroine'? At this point, such a reader may find himself running for cover. And that cover is readily available in the increasingly marketised but already threatened palaces of academe where sociology by definition excludes the earth, geography tucks the earth away neatly into a realm inhabited by 'physical' practitioners far from that more vocal realm patrolled by 'human' practitioners, and both sociologists and geographers (physical and human) largely isolate themselves from the increasingly denuded humanities (now a luxury, it would seem, like social provision for the sick and poor that 'we' can no longer afford). Something more than an interdisciplinary approach is required if we are to find a sure path across such a sundered and exploited landscape. There are of course exceptions to such foreshortened understandings and misunderstandings. Lefebvre followed by Merrifield provide a distinguished one, but not one articulating a new paradigm that can enable 'the marriage of true minds' across the chasms between these three academic empires. Both Lefebvre and Merrifield make that journey but return together only in this context in the company of the undeniably significant Joyce and the somewhat conveniently myopic (particularly for urbanists) Asimov. But without Chernyshevsky.

From the brief extract quoted above it is apparent that the novel *What is to be done?* presents difficulties for contemporary readers. In his important and influential book *All That is Solid Melts into Air* Marshall Berman put forward a largely unsympathetic account of *What Is To Be Done?*, ultimately preferring Chernyshevsky's rival, Dostoevsky, though he does point out the novel's

emphasis on the symbolic significance of action in the street and on some of the specificities of a particular city, St. Petersburg. A more contextualised and comprehensive reading is provided by Richard Freeborn in his major study, *The Russian Revolutionary novel*. He notes: 'In its political effects, as a fundamental text of Russian socialism, this novel has probably changed the world more than any other. The vision of the socialist future projected by the novel is usually assumed to be the Crystal Palace constructed of aluminium, with conditions of controlled humidity and a surrounding hydraulic civilisation... Freedom and equality, based on principles of rational egoism, here reign supreme. But the anthropocentric form of this vision, which appealed more to Chernyshevsky than the institutional or technological... is epitomised in the deliberate idealism of the heroine, Vera Pavlovna, in her fourth dream. The ideal of emancipated womanhood becomes clearly identified with the creation of myth' (244-5).<sup>s</sup>

Chernyshevski is, then, seeking to bring together a number of items of which some may appear to be incompatible: technology, freedom, equality, rational egoism, idealism, a heroine, and myth—and, one should add, a goddess. *He does, though, bring them together* except for those governed by the a priori principle that they are irretrievably incompatible. To take, for example, a palace, technology and the last three items listed here—a heroine, myth and a goddess—, it should be noted that they are brought together in an original way. The heroine is both an initially isolated individual and, increasingly, a person, representative and symbolic, deeply attentive to new ideas and to their relationship to practice, both in her personal relationships and in her work (she forms a cooperatives of seamstresses). The goddess is apparently a mythical figure but also a symbol representing emerging comradeship:

You wanted to know my name, but I have no name other than what I appear to be...You've seen who I am. There is nothing greater than mankind and womankind. I am she who appears before you, who loves and is loved (245).

The palace, as Freeborn implies, refers in part not only Paxton's Crystal Palace in London but also, more importantly, one attuned to a 'surrounding hydraulic civilisation'. He elaborates a little:

In material terms, the basis of the new life... would seem to be hydraulic: field irrigation, drainage, the maintenance of humidity (25).

*What is to be done?* is, then a novel of an unfamiliar kind. Marx does not seem to have read it, but he was familiar with Chernyshevsky's philosophical work and economic and social commentary. Despite its considerable length

and ex-centric nature (approximately 400 pages in the Katz edition), in part, it is at times, almost a critical compendium for living, with a narrative element, and provocation of the reader with Brechtian estrangement devices and playfulness. It was a book taken up by peasants and by students, both when working with peasants and in their own personal and urban contexts, in the search for fundamental social transformation. There is an autobiographical statement by Lenin that conveys the difficulty, force and impact of the book: 'Chernyshevsky's novel is too complicated, too full of ideas, to understand and evaluate at an early age. I myself tried to read it when I was about fourteen.. That was an utterly pointless, superficial reading. But after the execution of my brother, knowing that Chernyshevsky's novel was one of his favourite books, I set about reading it properly and sat over reading it not just a few days but whole weeks. It was only then that I understood its depth. It's a thing that can fire one's energies over a whole lifetime' (24).

#### *An Interim conclusion*

It has been argued in this series that the present dominant orthodoxy in much writing on 'planetary urbanisation' with its exclusive emphasis on 'the urban' and consequent neglect/denial of 'the rural', and its minimal deployment of the humanities, reflecting the somewhat ramshackle condition of the socio-spatial sciences, cannot do justice to the nature of life on the planet and therefore cannot provide an adequate account or critique of planetary urbanisation, in fact is in danger of becoming an accomplice in that imperial(ist) project (a point to which I give detailed attention later in the series). An alternative paradigm, presented here, is one in which the biosocial nature of culture, including its relationship to gender, agriculture and 'the rural', is central.

This episode, drawing particularly on Marx's studies of the Russian commune and Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?*, seeks to contribute to the identification of a partly agrarian and 'encultured' communalist path, one ultimately related to the full spectrum of life and sentience on the planet. **'The spectre of democracy' is, it has been asserted and will later be fully argued, is the reality behind capitalist/imperialist urbanization and its accelerating domination and destruction of the 'wild-flowered planet'. Communism played a major part in that domination and destruction but its one time predominantly spectral aspects have long been fading and its relationship to communalism has been emerging within a larger appreciation of sentience and the planet. 'Back to Marx?', then, but to a Marx and companions, plant, animal and human, we scarcely know and can but scarcely know within an outmoded paradigm and embedded practice.** Among the more surprising companions included in this episode are

heroines and heroes that link back to the discussion of lichens, moles, serpents and vertebrates in earlier episodes, an exploration intended to contribute to notions of leadership appropriate to the reclamation of the now acutely over-urbanised planet.

## Endnotes

1 Buck-Morss, S (2010) 'The Second Time as Farce...Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present', in Douzinas, C and Zizek, C, eds (2010), *The Idea of Communism*, London: Verso, p.80.

2 Merrifield notes: 'In Asimov's Foundation saga, there's no alien presence, no non-human life, save humanly made robots: his vision of the universe is all the more interesting because it is all-too-human. (Merrifield, A. 2013. *The Politics of the Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest Under Planetary Urbanisation*.' (p.88) All- too-human? Or all too inhuman ( and non-animal or even in-animate?)

3 'Rural idiocy'. Idiocy is not an exact English equivalent for what Marx had in mind. But there probably isn't one. The remark referred both to a specific situation and a general condition. From Marx's training and continued interest and deep interest in the 'classics' (one fundamental point about Marx in this series is that Marx is a profoundly literary writer and to a significant degree his work cannot be understood without this recognition) and was fully aware of the fact that "the meaning of 'idiot' in ancient Athens came from 'Idiotes', a citizen who was cut off from public life, and who viewed... public life from a narrow, parochial viewpoint, hence 'idiotic'" (JBF, p.136). The problem with the usage of this word is how much one relates the latter dismissive use to the former more explanatory ones. The latter explanatory use refers both to behaviour in specific situations, such as the peasants reactionary class identification in mid-century France (as discussed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire), and to a general condition, the division between town and country (as discussed in the German Ideology and the Communist Manifesto).

4 It should be clear that this is not just his Russian phase nor one of the flickering of a once great mind. It is a new phase in his work in which he is reconsidering earlier in the light of new evidence, experience and possibilities (theoretical and actual) The complexity of late Marx JBF (218-219).

5 Alice Walker introduced the word "womanist" into feminist parlance in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She cited the phrase "acting womanish," which was said to a child who acted serious, courageous and grown-up rather than girlish. Many women of color in the 1970s had sought to expand the feminism of the Women's Liberation Movement beyond its concern for the problems of white middle-class women. The adoption of "womanist" signified an inclusion of race and class issues in feminism.' *Free Women's History Newsletter!*

## 21

# Labour Migration, Brokerage, and Governance in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries

by Filippo Osella

Immigrant labour has played a fundamental role in the economic development and nation-building endeavours of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. By 1985, following the oil-boom decade, the number of foreign labourers in the six GCC nations as a whole stood at 4.4 million. A little more than two decades later, that number had nearly tripled, increasing to 11 million by 2008. According to the latest data, the proportion of foreigners in the labour forces of the GCC countries is an average of 67% (3). Saudi Arabia is at the low end of that range, with 50%, while Qatar, with 87%, is at the high end. Even with concerted government efforts to support employment of GCC nationals reliance on foreign labour is expected to increase yet further in the coming years, as the region continues to pursue ambitious plans for industrial and infrastructural.

Management of labour migration across other GCC countries entails regulations limiting residence to short-term employment contracts, while at the same time encouraging and facilitating international labour mobility. As a consequence, members of the immigrant labour force typically move repeatedly between their home and host countries in a pattern akin to what in sociological literature has been referred to as “circular migration”. The nature of their employment is almost always temporary, but recurrent—normally, repeated in contracts of three or four years long—so that they are engaged simultaneously with both their country of employment and their country of origin over long periods of time. The flow of migrants’ remittances back to their home countries has contributed much-needed foreign exchange and played a substantial role in the economic life of labour-sending nations.

Circular migration to the GCC area has acquired a degree of continuity. Migrants might spend their whole working lives moving back and forth between the Gulf and their country of origin, so that in many sending countries, it has been normalized as part of everyday life. But a migrant's social class, ethnicity, and profession lead to different outcomes. By-and-large, middle-class migrant professionals and entrepreneurs can secure, over time, a measure of long-term stability in employment and residence in the GCC countries that remains beyond reach to most unskilled migrant labour. At the same time, employment in the GCC area is characterized by various degrees of segmentation in terms of occupation, gender and nationality, so that certain sectors are dominated almost entirely by Gulf Arab citizens—typically the public sector—and others by labour migrants: domestic help, the service sector, and the construction industry, for instance. Whilst this segmentation of employment has driven the sustained economic growth since the oil boom of the 1970s, it has also contributed to creating a substantial socio-legal and economic divide between citizens and migrants across the GCC region. Wages and working conditions, for example, are better in the citizen-dominated public sector than in sectors where migrant labour is pervasive.

The process of migration itself has been largely informal. Migration to GCC countries is seldom an individual project: webs of kinship and friendship are the building blocks of complex social networks that provide migrant labourers with the funds, know-how, and contacts that enable people to circulate across borders. At the same time, these networks provide various degrees of social protection for migrants and their families in case of failure or hardships. Migration brokers with links to those webs of kinship—big-men, fixers, go-betweens, middle-men, agents—are often at the centre of local migration networks. Private and public recruitment agencies normally rely on the contacts, networks, and financial resources of these brokers. In other words, the boundaries between formal and informal channels of recruitment are extremely porous and blurred, so that multiple and overlapping actors facilitate the migration process: licensed recruitment companies, unlicensed individual operations, village heads, traders, teachers, religious leaders/institutions, state officials, and migrants themselves.

Both brokers and agencies—whether informal or formal and government-approved—are key actors in the migration process. Operating at various points in that process, they smooth relationships between would-be migrants and local bureaucracies in the often difficult task of acquiring migration documents, provide loans to finance migration, negotiate jobs, and guide migrants through the labyrinth of sub-contracting that characterizes the

current global labour market. However, whilst migration agents and brokers mediate between the demand and supply of labour, their (often unregulated) practices might lead to substantial exploitation of migrants. Hefty fees, corruption and outright cheating are all too common, often leaving migrants and their families to shoulder substantial debts.

Many within and outside the GCC area argue that the current migration regime—whose hyper-exploitative practices have circulated widely and globally in the media—needs substantial reform, and wide-ranging consultations are taking place with an eye to a substantial reformulation of immigration and labour policies. An apparent consensus is emerging between the governments of countries sending labour and those receiving it in the GCC area, as well as international labour organizations and NGOs, and employers. This consensus envisages that adequately regulating the cross-border migration of labour will bring multiple benefits. For instance, it will produce a more efficient and reliable labour market, simplify the policing and governance of migration, and also substantially reduce the exploitation of migrant labour by recruiters and employers. In Qatar, for instance, the outcome of this consensus is the progressive introduction of policies fostering a shift toward delegating the recruitment (at the point of origin) and employment (in the place of destination) of all migrant labour to government-approved “ethical agencies” that would guarantee contractual fairness and transparency to migrants and employers. The eventual phasing out or redefinition of the current ‘sponsorship’ (*kafala*) system, and a substantial curb on informal networks of migration brokerage underpins these reforms.

In the meantime, labour-sending countries favour reforms to ensure a control of the flow of migrant remittances—nowadays openly recognized as central to national development—whilst providing a degree of (social and legal) protection for their migrant population. In the last twenty years, attempts to regulate migration to GCC countries have taken the form of bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries, and more flexible modes of ‘migration diplomacy’—migration policy as an indirect form of foreign policy (see, for example, early migration policies in Saudi Arabia). Although this process is by no means straightforward—for instance, there have been temporary bans on sending Indonesian domestic servants to both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, ostensibly because of violence against migrants—there is an increasing harmonization of such inter-state policies and bilateral agreements, leading to new forms of regionalization. In many sending countries, such as India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, policies have been introduced, for instance, with the apparent aim of sustaining and protecting migrant mobility, thus



transforming these countries into labour brokerage states that proactively send their citizens abroad. With the growing demands for documentation in most sending countries (in order to issue passports and non-objection certificates, for instance), and the regularization of channels of migration recruitment, the role of state actors in the migration process has become more extensive.

Yet despite the bevy of efforts currently underway in the GCC area to formalize and regulate the recruitment and employment of migrant labour, the question arises of the tension between the intents of regulatory policies and the complexities of actual practice. The logic behind emerging migration policies is that the introduction of ethical policies of recruitment and employment—unfettered access to information regarding conditions of employment, transparency in contracts, controlled fees and costs of migration, and so on—will inevitably lead to fairer working conditions for migrant labour and a more efficient labour market. But the reality is certainly much more complex. The actual overlap of formal and informal networks of brokerage, the important role that the latter play in labour migrants' everyday lives, and the complex system of sub-contracting that underpins the workings of Qatar's labour market might all hinder effective reforms. By regularizing informal channels of migration and brokerage, GCC nations might not necessarily see a generalized formalization of the (migrant) labour market. Instead, the outcome might be a 'formalization of the informality' of migration and employment that, instead of providing security and fairness, simply hides away existing abuses and exploitation, and creates new ones. Indeed, attempts to regulate and formalize recruitment of migrant labour in the GCC nations have had, to date, mixed results. Regardless of formal contracts signed with government-approved recruitment agencies, migrants still have to renegotiate wages or employment on arrival in the GCC, wages are often lower than what had been agreed, kickbacks continue to be necessary to smooth migration, employers have not ceased to retain the migrants' passports, and so on. In other words, the formalization of recruitment has not yet lived up to the promise of eliminating abuses and exploitation of migrant labour to the GCC countries.

At the same time, many labour migrants view the formal recruitment structures that have been introduced in their home countries as yet another layer of inefficient and rapacious bureaucracy obstructing the path towards a better life. Informal brokers and networks remain their main source of support and socialization, helping them to navigate the everyday predicaments of work and life in GCC countries. Consequently, formal, government-approved migration brokers will inevitably need to continue to rely on the services of informal agents to recruit perspective migrants. Indeed, going against the grain

of conventional understandings of brokerage as withering away under modern capitalism, evidence from the GCC states indicates that growing regulation and formalization will actually expand the role (of various modalities) of migration brokerage, even within extensive and well-established migrant networks, and in countries where, to date, only a small proportion of migrants use formal channels of migration.

With their move toward formalization of migrant labour, the GCC countries are not looking to phase out circular migration, but rather to continue to capitalize on it whilst responding to media accusations that they favour a system of neo-slavery. Whilst proponents of circular migration present it as a “win-win-win” situation—receiving countries are guaranteed a steady labour supply, migrants are ensured employment and control of wages, and sending countries are promised increasing flows of remittances that support local development—it is evident to many—migrant labour in particular—that strict controls render migrants vulnerable, restrict to long-term settlement, and the reproduce labour segregation and exploitation. More importantly, attempts to regulate and formalize recruitment and employment not only will criminalize informal networks of support central to migrant labour’s lives, but also do not address the root causes of current forms of hyper-exploitation. The main drivers of exploitative practices are the system of sub-contracting that defines employment, and, more importantly, the absence of a labour market. Even with introduction of ‘ethical’ forms of employment and recruitment, migrant labour will not be able to choose the best employer offering the higher wages. Breaking employment contracts remains highly problematic—often entailing substantial loss of earnings, as a high proportion of wages are paid at the end of contract—and to shift from one job to another requires leaving the GCC countries, re-applying for a visa, and so on. Significantly, the introduction of a labour market is not on the agenda for reform.

## Alienation and Urban Life

by David Harvey

In recent times a pattern of popular protest has arisen in many parts of the world that calls for some explanation. Many of these protests have occurred in cities and while in each instance the trigger was particular there seem to be some commonalities among these diverse irruptions of popular discontent. In Brazil, to take one example, the trigger was the rising costs of public transport but the protests quickly expanded to encompass everything from excessive investments in the mega-events of the world cup and the Olympic games to corruption and excessive police violence. The protests occurred not only in Rio and São Paulo but also in many other cities from Florianopolis to Salvador. In Istanbul, to take another example, the initial protest was over converting a park in the symbolic centre into a shopping mall but it quickly and unexpectedly morphed and spread to many other cities like Ankara and Izmir as a protest against excessive police violence and the arrogance of a regime gone autocratic. In London, Stockholm, Athens, Paris and elsewhere, major disruptions arose that were supplemented by an 'Occupy' movement that began in the US but then spread to many cities in several countries. The recurring and sometimes massive anti-austerity protests across all of Southern Europe in particular (from Spain to Greece) also had a common theme and an urban focus in the squares. Movements that began as pro-democracy in North Africa, Bosnia as well as in Syria and Ukraine initially exhibited some similar urban characteristics (particularly in Cairo) before they later got tangled up with geopolitical rivalries, ethnic, religious and nationalist struggles.

So what do these volatile sometimes explosive and often short-lived protests and movements betoken?

The idea I want to explore here is that the commonality between them can best be captured through an examination of the widespread and growing sense of alienation from not only the harsh realities of a capitalism gone corrupt, brutal and rogue and a daily life gone wonky, but also from all the institutions that in prior periods had helped corral diverse forms of popular discontent into acceptable paths of negotiation and compromise to sometimes produce ameliorations to living and working conditions in meaningful ways. So what role can the theory of alienation play in explaining current events?

The verb to alienate has a variety of meanings.

1. As a legal term it means to transfer a private property right to the ownership of another. I alienate a piece of land when I sell it to another. Alienation is, therefore, inherent in all commodification and market exchange. It is, however, redeemable to the degree that an equivalent value can be acquired to that which has been traded away—sellers may have been separated from a specific use value but can receive in return the value equivalent (usually in money form). The possibility exists for what Marx called “reciprocity in alienation”. But the exchange can also be one-sided such that one party exploits the other and under capitalism such extractions of surplus value are systemic rather than conjunctural. Non-reciprocal alienation can occur through market mechanisms or through accumulation by dispossession.
2. As a social relation alienation refers to how affections, loyalties and trust can be transferred to or stolen away from one person or institution to another. The alienation (loss) of trust (in persons or in institutions such as the market, law, the banks, the political system and above all in the money form) can be exceedingly damaging to the social fabric.
3. As a passive emotive state alienation means to become or feel cut off from some valued connectivities in irredeemable ways. It is characterized by a sense of loss, of sorrow, grief and melancholia, a mourning for real or perceived losses that seem difficult if not impossible to recapture and for which there is no substitutable value. The passivity is typically reinforced by a sense of powerlessness and of helplessness in the face of overwhelming forces. Insofar as this form of alienation founds an expressive politics, it is prone to produce sudden and unpredictable outbursts of sometimes

violent anger and protest that quickly subside back into passivity.

4. As an active condition, alienation means to be overtly angry and hostile, to act out at being deprived or dispossessed of value and of the capacity to pursue valued ends. Alienated beings vent their anger and hostility towards those identified as the enemy, sometimes without any clear definitive or rational reason. Or they may plot and plan, construct political organizations and movements aiming to recuperate or redeem that which has been lost (such as the surplus value stolen from workers by capital) or that which is being unfairly denied (such as adequate remuneration for housework). Alienated beings may, finally, seek to build a world in which alienation has either been abolished or rendered redeemable or reciprocal. A movement to recuperate the right to the city on the part of those who have been dispossessed is such a claim.

This last form of alienation is sometimes called “estrangement” (cf. Berardi) to clearly differentiate its active qualities from the passive forms. But I find the diversity of overlapping meanings useful. The worker legally alienates the use of his or her labor power for a stated period of time to the capitalist in return for a wage. But laborers get back only a portion of the value they create. They are alienated from the surplus value they produce. Meanwhile the capitalist seeks to build the loyalty of the worker to capitalism by creating a competitive (alienating) relation to co-workers and fragmenting the labor force along identity politics lines. The worker is estranged from his and her product as well as from nature and all other aspects of social life during the time of the labor contract and usually beyond (given the exhausting nature of the work). A state of deprivation and dispossession is internalized as a sense of loss and frustration of creative alternatives foregone.

The political problem for the alienated, as Berardi notes, is to shift from the passive to the active (estranged) form of alienation. The concepts of socialism and communism have traditionally rested on the premise that alienation is recuperable and redeemable and that class struggle should seek to build a world in which alienation is either eradicated or reduced to reciprocal forms. Ruling (capitalist) class power, on the other hand, strives always (whether consciously or not does not matter) to resist or coopt alienation in its active expressive forms and to push it back into passivity by use of various forms of repression (legal, military, political, of whatever) and a variety of other tactics. What we have seen in the anti-austerity movements of southern Europe, for example, has been a long drawn out and, some would say broadly successful struggle on

the part of capitalist class power via its command of the state apparatus and its superior command of economic and police power to squash the active forms of struggle and to reduce protest to a passive mass of alienated, discouraged and therefore more easily ignored and manipulable populations. But this form of alienation is consistent with occasional irruptions of violent rage. Political power typically waits on such irruptions in order to immediately crush them, to depict them as terrorism and to justify the further strengthening of state repressive laws and powers.

Are the recent uprisings in cities around the world a response to a widespread and deepening sense of alienation and to what degree do they indicate a social order that for all its geographical differences and particularities is perpetually on the cusp of an oscillating movement from the passive to the active forms of alienation and back again?

I think this offers an interesting perspective to understand the forms that political revolts are now typically taking and how the dynamics of class struggle are being constructed in our times.

I recently undertook a study of the contradictions of capital from the standpoint of the universal alienation that is pervasive to capitalism. (Harvey, 2014) This may be helpful in unravelling the diverse sources of alienation at the same time as it speaks to the question of how, as Brecht once put it, “hope is latent in contradictions”. For example, the tactile contact with the commodity—its use value—is lost and the sensual relation to nature is occluded by the domination of exchange value and the spread of alien commodification to all aspects of social life. The social value and meaning of laboring gets obscured in the representational form of an alienating monetary system. The capacity to arrive democratically at collective decisions gets lost in the perpetual battle between the conflicting rationalities of isolated private interests and of state powers. Social wealth disappears into the pockets of private persons (producing a world of unequal private wealth and public squalor). The direct producers of value are alienated from the value they produce. Class formation creates an ineradicable gulf between people that is masked by all manner of contortions of social relations and confusions within divisions of labor. All prospects for social equality or social justice are lost even as the universality of equality before the law is trumpeted as the supreme bourgeois virtue. Accumulated resentments at accumulation by dispossession in the field of the realization of capital (through housing displacements and foreclosures, for example) boil over. Freedom becomes domination.

The catalytic political problem that derives from all this is to identify, confront and overcome the many forms of alienation produced by the economic engine

of capital and to channel the pent-up energy, the anger and the frustration they produce, into a coherent anti-capitalist opposition. Dare we hope for an unalienated (or at least less alienated and more humanly acceptable) relation to nature, to each other, to the work we do and to the way we live and love?

The problem begins with the evolution of work and the division of labor under capitalism. “The economic rationalization of work” that occurs with the capitalist development of technological powers, writes Andre Gorz, produces “individuals who, being alienated in their work, will, necessarily be alienated in their consumption as well, and eventually, in their needs. Since there is no limit to the quantity of money that can be earned and spent, there will no longer be any limit to the needs that money allow them to have or to the need for money itself. These needs increase in line with social wealth. The monetarization of work and needs will eventually abolish the limitations which the various philosophies of life had placed on them” (22). This concomitantly “sweep(s) away the ancient idea of freedom and existential autonomy”.

Recent polls in the United States, for example, indicate that some 70 per cent of those employed in wage labour either hate their jobs or are totally indifferent to the work they do. This is not that surprising given that class struggle considerations have dictated paths of technological and organizational change designed to eliminate or routinize jobs. Technologies whose effect and aim are to eliminate or routinize work cannot, at the same time, glorify work as the essential source of personal identity and fulfillment. Meaningless work is exhausting and demoralizing.

The contemporary technologies of working and consuming likewise do “violence to Nature and to our own and other people’s bodies. The culture of everyday life is a culture of violence, or, in its most extreme form, a systematic, thought-out, sublimated, aggravated *culture of barbarism*”. This penetrates to the very core of daily life by way of the instruments we daily use to live that life, including all those we handle in our work. Gorz continues: “Persuading individuals that the consumer goods and services they are offered adequately compensate for the sacrifice they must make in order to obtain them and that such consumption constitutes a haven of individual happiness which sets them apart from the crowd is something which typically belongs to the sphere of commercial advertising”. But such “compensatory goods and services” are “neither necessary nor even merely useful. They are always presented as containing an element of luxury, of superfluity, of fantasy, which by designating the purchaser as a ‘happy and privileged person’ protects him or her from the pressures of a rationalized universe and the obligation to conduct themselves in a functional manner. Compensatory goods are therefore desired as much—if

not more—for their uselessness as for their use value; for it is this element of uselessness (in superfluous gadgets and ornaments, for example) which symbolizes the buyer's escape from the collective universe in a haven of private sovereignty". This consumerism of excess, this uselessness, comprises much of urban life. Alien consumerism occupies the city, leaving us drowning in a wealth of compensatory goods, the ownership of which is taken as a sign of freedom of choice in the market place of human desires.

The progress of alien or compensatory consumerism has its own internally destructive dynamics. It requires what Schumpeter called "creative destruction" to be let loose upon the land. Daily urban life in the city, settled ways of living, relating and socializing, are again and again disrupted to make way for the latest fad or fancy. Demolitions and displacements to make way for gentrification or disneyfication break open already achieved fabrics of urban living to make way for the gaudy and the gargantuan, the ephemeral and the fleeting. Dispossession and destruction, displacement and construction become vehicles for vigorous and speculative capital accumulation as the figures of the financier and the rentier, the developer, the landed proprietor and the entrepreneurial mayor step from the shadows into the forefront of capital's logic of accumulation through alienation and dispossession. The economic engine that is capital circulation and accumulation, gobbles up whole cities only to spit out new urban forms in spite of the resistance of people who feel alienated entirely from the processes that not only re-shape the environments in which they live but also re-define the kind of person they must become in order to survive. The coalition of the unwilling in relation to this forced redefinition of human nature constitutes a pool of alienated individuals that periodically erupts in riots and revolutionary movements.

Money supplants all other values notes Gorz. Along with this goes "an incentive to withdraw into the private sphere and give it priority, to the pursuit of 'personal' advantages". This then "contributes to the disintegration of networks of solidarity and mutual assistance, social and family cohesion and our sense of belonging. Individuals socialized by (alien) consumerism are no longer socially integrated individuals but individuals who are encouraged to 'be themselves' by distinguishing themselves from others and who only resemble these others in their refusal (socially channelled into consumption) to assume responsibility for the common condition by taking common action". Affections and loyalties to particular places and cultural forms are viewed as anachronisms. Is this not what the spread of the neoliberal ethic proposed and eventually accomplished?

Many people likewise find themselves with less and less time and space for free creative activity in the midst of widespread time-saving technologies in



both production and consumption. How does this paradox come about? It takes a lot of time, of course, to manage, run and service all the time-saving household paraphernalia with which we are surrounded and the more paraphernalia we have the more time it takes. The sheer complexity of the support apparatus embroils us in endless telephone calls or e-mails to service centers, credit card and telephone companies, insurance companies, and the like. There is also no question that the cultural habits with which we have surrounded the fetish worship of technological gizmos captures the playful side of our imaginations and has us uselessly watching sit-coms, trawling the internet, or playing computer games for hours on end. We are surrounded with “weapons of mass distraction” at very turn. But none of this explains why time flies away from us in the way it does. The deeper reason lies, I think, in the structured way capital has approached the issue of consumption time as a potential barrier to accumulation.

“If savings in worktime do not serve to liberate time, and if this liberated time is not used for ‘the free self realization of individuals,’ then these savings in working time are totally devoid of meaning” (184). Society may be moving towards “the programmed, staged reduction of working hours, without loss of real income, in conjunction with a set of accompanying policies which will allow this liberated time to become time for free self-realization for everyone”. But such an unalienated emancipatory development is threatening in the extreme for capitalist class power and the resistances and barriers created are strong. “The development of the productive forces may of itself reduce the amount of labour that is necessary; it cannot of itself create the conditions which will make this liberation of time a liberation for all. History may place the opportunity for greater freedom within our grasp, but it cannot release us from the need to seize this opportunity for ourselves and derive benefit from it. Our liberation will not come about as the result of material determinism, behind our backs, as it were. The potential for liberation which a process contains can only be realized if human beings seize it and use it to make themselves free”.

Confronting collectively the multiple alienations that capital produces is a compelling way to mobilize anti-capitalist politics. Universal alienation calls for a full-blooded political response. And there is much that goes on in the city—in the streets and parks, in places of sociality and of living and working—that is marked by a desperate longing to construct islands of unalienated activity in the midst of the sea of necessarily alienated relations required to sustain endless accumulation of wealth and power on the part of the privileged classes. The city is a fertile field in which to study such conflicts. But the difficulty is that so far at least no way has been found to turn this turmoil of conflicts into an anti-capitalist movement. So what are the barriers to turning the alienation

characterized by passive if smoldering resentment against endless capital accumulation into the alienation productive of vigorous organized action?

The functionalist thesis I want to propose here is that any dominant mode of production and its particular mode of political articulation defines the spaces and the forms of its own opposition and does so in such a way as to guarantee its own reproduction. In the era generally referred to as Fordism, the large factories serviced by an industrial working class gave rise to trade union forms of organization, social democratic-oriented political parties (and in much of Europe communist parties that had significant mass support). This oppositional configuration was rarely revolutionary precisely because it was tightly embedded within the logic of the then-existing capitalist order. The hegemonic practices of neoliberalism that came to dominate after the crisis of the 1970s weakened and in some instances destroyed the redoubts of traditional working class power in both the economic and the political arenas. All of this gradually (and in a few instances precipitously) gave way to decentralised and networked oppositional forms animated by a deep distrust of the state and by the assertion of individual rights or an identity politics that fragmented oppositional movements. Yet in the United States it was Ronald Reagan who proclaimed that government was the problem and not the solution and it was the libertarian right wing that most vociferously proclaimed the virtues of individual liberty and freedom. These neoliberal positions have been embraced by anarchists and the autonomistas who concur with Reagan that government is the problem. Does this make them Reaganite even though oppositional? NGOs (many cast in the rhetoric of progressive redistribution) have become the cutting edge for the privatization of state welfare functions. By definition NGOs, being under the patronage of corporations and wealthy individuals, cannot challenge the accumulation of wealth. All they can do is to seek to remedy the worst and most glaring forms of injustice. The effect has been to encourage narratives of personalized victimization as the basis for a remedial politics that cannot challenge the amassing of immense corporate power and personal fortunes nor build large scale anti-capitalist movements. Narratives of victimization are a weak base upon which to construct solidarious anti-capitalist movements, but this is what much of organized left politics is reduced to.

A functionalist exploration of this sort is useful in the sense that it generates a whole series of propositions about the contemporary ways of doing politics that might usefully be explored. When, for example, Ronald Reagan famously argued that government is not the solution but the problem, when Margaret Thatcher also famously argued that there is no such thing as society

only individuals and their families, were they not setting the stage for anti-state individualism and localism to assume the core position defining oppositional ambitions?

The result is the production of civil society movements that are diverse, fragmented, individualized and oriented largely to mandating remedies and claims of specific injustices in which it is crucial to be able to show not only individual harms to individual parties but also either direct intent or culpable negligence on the part of the supposed perpetrators of these harms. Much of the progressive left is confined to rights questions and discourses and no matter how effective they may be this cannot challenge (indeed it helps sustain) capitalist class power.

There is one further point of some significance. This relates to the phenomena of rapidly increasing indebtedness. Debt has long been an instrument of social control for ruling elites. “Debt encumbered homeowners do not go on strike” it was said in the 1930s and so the promulgation of the dream of homeownership via the assumption of debts performed double duty in stabilizing popular political support for capitalism. But indebtedness also has an important impact, as Lazzarato points out, on political subjectivity more generally. “The debt economy is an economy of time and subjectification... All financial innovations have but one sole purpose; possessing the future in advance by objectivizing it... (This) means subordinating all possibility of choice and decision which the future holds to the reproduction of capitalist power relations. In this way, debt appropriates... each person’s future as well as the future of society as a whole”. This is as true for corporate and sovereign state debt as it is for individual long-term indebtedness. This explains why it is that so many people, as the saying goes, find it “easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”. The future of capitalism is already foretold through its indebtedness. The grasp this has upon our political imaginations is incalculable.

Once it is clearly acknowledged that political power has broadly dictated the terms of its own opposition and once we recognize how much our oppositional stances have been circumscribed by these terms, then it becomes both possible and imperative to find ways to go beyond these terms as a condition of revolutionary change. There are movements that clearly do so (and often suffer greatly for it). What this means for politics requires deeper discussion. And that is the issue I want to put on the table for this conference.

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# AFTERWORD





## Emerging Common Spaces as a Challenge to the City of Crisis

by Stavros Stavrides  
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In today's Athens we can indeed trace the devastating effects the paroxysmic financialization of capitalist economy has on processes of urban and social reproduction. We can also however discover emerging new forms of resistance to the policies of capitalist crisis, which are connected to acts that transform public space. Such acts shape urban space as a means to create new social bounds and to build forms of collective struggle and survival.

Two crucial tasks are laid before a necessary return to politics for the governing elites which imagined that they, at last, could do away with the obstacles labor creates to profit (Midnight Notes 2009). The first one is to ensure that social bonds continue to constitute individuals as economic subjects, as subjects whose behavior and motives can be analyzed, channeled, predicted upon and, ultimately, controlled by the use of economic parameters and measures only. The second one is to ensure that people continue to act and dream without participating in any form of connectedness and coordination with others. It is against these dominant policies that people gropingly re-discover the importance of taking their lives in their hands. Creating common spaces is an essential step in this direction.

Emerging practices of urban commoning in Athens may be connected to two crucial events that catalyzed processes of dissident awareness. The December 2008 youth uprising (Stavrides 2010a) and the Syntagma square occupation. Both events produced collective experiences that reclaim the city as a potentially liberating environment and reshape crucial questions that characterize emancipatory politics. In this context, the city becomes not only the setting but also the means to collectively experiment on possible alternative forms of social organization.

For some, the project of autonomy may be described as a process that creates completely independent socio-spatial entities which become capable of reproducing themselves with no recourse to their hostile social and political surrounding. Autonomous areas, thus, are meant to create their own rules of self regulation and people inhabit them by following those rules.

The Greek state wanted and still wants to sustain the myth of a locatable marginal “outside” of dissent because it can “surgically” intervene when it chooses to crush paradigmatically and emblematically any dissident behavior by giving, at the same time, the impression that these behaviors only exist in secluded enclaves. What the December youth uprising has done was to shift the media and police focus from the allegedly anomic Exarchia enclave to many other Athens’ neighborhoods, and to other major Greek cities (Stavrides 2010a). The state could not present the December uprising as one more Exarchia centered incident of “rioting hooliganism”.

Autonomous spaces can be represented as separated spaces, spaces which are fantasized as liberated enclaves surrounded by a hostile capitalist environment. Through a powerful spatial metaphor, autonomy is equated to spatial distinctness, to circumscribed areas which are defined by their exteriority to the rest of the city-society.

The Occupied Navarinou park project, however, (as well as many neighborhood initiatives after Syntagma occupation), hints towards a different imaginary of emancipating autonomy. Always porous and open to new potential users, Navarinou park may support a spatial experience as well as a spatial metaphor which is beyond and against the experience and metaphor of the enclave (Marcuse and Van Kempen 2002, Atkinson and Blandy 2005 and Graham and Marvin 2001). The park’s porous perimeter is defined by spatial arrangements which acquire the characteristics of a threshold rather than those of a boundary. Actually, the park itself may be considered as a multileveled and multiform urban threshold.

Threshold spatiality may host and express practices of commoning that are not contained in secluded worlds shared by secluded communities of commoners. Thresholds explicitly symbolize the potentiality of sharing by establishing intermediary areas of crossing, by opening inside to outside. As mechanisms which regulate and give meaning to acts of passage, thresholds may become powerful tools in the construction of institutions of expanding commoning. Many societies strictly and boldly control symbolic and real thresholds because people may “lose their way” and discover potential common worlds that are beyond the corresponding society’s established hierarchies. But, in the process of expanding commoning which directly defies capitalist

society's enclosures, thresholds may become both the image and the setting of emancipating experiences of sharing. Thresholds are potential socio-spatial "artifices of equality" (Rancière 2010: 92).

Maybe we need to abandon a view of autonomy that fantasizes uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation (Stavrides 2009: 53 and Negri 2009: 50). The prevailing experiences of urban enclosures and the dominant imaginary of recognizable identity enclaves colonize the thought and action of those who attempt to go beyond capitalist hegemony. Threshold experience and the threshold metaphor offer a counter-example to the dominant enclave city (Stavrides 2010b). Rather than perpetuating an image of the capitalist city as an archipelago of enclave-islands, we need to create spaces that inventively threaten this peculiar urban order by upsetting dominant taxonomies of spaces and life types. Those spaces-as-thresholds acquire a dubious, precarious perhaps but also virus-like existence: they become active catalysts in the presence of potentially explosive chemical compounds.

This is where the problem of the "institutions of commoning" (Roggero 2010: 369) arises. By its very constitution as a tool of social organization, an institution tends to circumscribe a community as a closed world of predictable and repeatable social practices. Thus, institutions of commoning may be employed to define specific commoning practices and the corresponding community of commoners as a closed self reproducing world too. But this may - and often does - lead to forms of enclosure (Angelis and Stavrides 2010: 12). For commoning to remain a force that produces forms of cooperation-through-sharing commoning has to be a process which overspills the boundaries of any established community, even if this community aspires to be an egalitarian and anti-authoritarian one. Emerging subjects of commoning actions transform themselves by always being open to "newcomers" (Rancière 2010: 59-60), by becoming themselves newcomers.

For commoning practices to become important pre-figurations of an emancipated society, commoning has to remain a collective struggle to re-appropriate and transform at the same time a society's common wealth (Hardt and Negri 2009: 251-253). Collective experiences as those of Syntagma square self managed tent city and the after-December experiments of neighborhood assemblies and initiatives (including the Navarinou park occupation) may construct an inspiring example of a culture based on equality, solidarity and collective inventiveness, only when they remain "infectious", osmotic and capable of extending egalitarian values and practices outside their boundaries.

Dominant institutions legitimize inequality, distinguishing between those who know and those who do not, between those who can take decisions

and those who must execute them, between those who have specific rights and those who are deprived of them. Thus, dominant institutions focused on the production and uses of public space are essentially forms of authorization which stem from certain authorities and aim at directing the behaviors of public space users (Stavrides 2012: 589).

There also exist dominant institutions which appear as grounded upon an abstract equality: real people with differentiated characteristics, needs and dreams are reduced to neutralized subjects of rights. Thus, in public space general rules appear as being addressed to homogenized users, users who can have access to a specific place at specific hours of the day (or who are not allowed to “step on the grass” and so on).

In both cases, dominant institutions classify and predict types of behavior and deal with only those differences which are fixed and perpetuated through the classifications they establish. Institutions of commoning established in a stable and well-defined community may very well look like the dominant institutions in the ways they regulate people’s rights and actions. There are obviously differences in terms of content: an institution that aims at guaranteeing a certain form of equality (no matter how abstract) is different from an institution that openly imposes discriminations. Institutions of expanding commoning, however, differ from the dominant ones not only in terms of content but also in terms of form. This makes them potentially different “social artifices” which are oriented towards different social bonds. Such institutions establish, first of all, the ground of comparisons between different subjects of action and also between different practices. Subjects of action and practices themselves become comparable and relevant: what is at stake is to invent forms of collaboration based not on homogenization but on multiplicity (Hardt and Negri 2005:348-349).

However, comparability is not enough. Institutions of commoning need to offer opportunities as well as tools for translating differences between views, between actions, and between subjectivities, one to the other. If comparability is based on the necessary and constitutive recognition of differences, translatability creates the ground for negotiations between differences without reducing them to common denominators. “An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators” (Rancière 2009: 22 and 17-20). Obviously, this is quite difficult, since dominant taxonomies tend to block those processes of establishing a socially recognizable common ground that are not based on the predominance of the ruling elites. Translation seeks correspondences but cannot and does not aspire to establish an absolute unobstructed mirroring of one language to the other. So does or should do an

institution which keeps alive the expanding potentiality of commoning. Indeed “...the common is always organized in translation” (Roggero 2010: 368).

A third characteristic of institutions of expanding commoning has very deep roots in the history of human societies. Social anthropologists have very well documented the existence of mechanisms in certain societies which prevent or discourage the accumulation of power. Depending on the case, these mechanisms were focused on the equal distribution of collected food, on the ritual destruction of wealth, on the symbolic sacrifice of leaders, on carnivalistic role reversals etc.

If institutions of commoning are meant to be able to support a constant opening of the circles of commoning they need to sustain mechanisms of control of any potential accumulation of power, either by individuals or by specific groups. If sharing is to be the guiding principle of self-management practices, then sharing of power is simultaneously the precondition of egalitarian sharing and its ultimate target. Egalitarian sharing, which needs to be able to include newcomers, has to be encouraged by an always expanding network of self-governance institutions. Such institutions can really be “open” and “perpetually in flux” (Hardt and Negri 2009: 358-359) but in very specific ways connected to the practices of expanding commoning. Power is first and foremost the power to decide. If however the power to decide is distributed equally through mechanisms of participation, then this power ceases to give certain people the opportunity (legitimized or not) to impose their will on others.

Perhaps what the collective experiments on space commoning in Athens during this crisis modestly gesture towards, is the possibility of reclaiming the city as a collective work of art (Lefebvre 1996: 174). To devise common spaces means, thus, something a lot more than to succeed in re-appropriating small pieces of still available open space. It means, explicitly or implicitly, sometimes in full conscience sometimes not, to discover the power to create new ambiguous, possibly contradictory but always open institutions of commoning. Space, actual physical space, but also metaphorical, imaginary space, becomes not only the ground which is necessary in order to see those institutions function: space shapes institutions of commoning and is shaped by them.

In the contemporary capitalist city people have to invent forms of life in order to survive. To help release the power of doing (Holloway 2010: 246-247), which capitalism continuously captures and traps in its mechanisms, we need to participate in the creation of spaces and institutions of expanding commoning. If autonomy has any meaning as an anti-capitalist venture, then

it must be constructed in-against-and-beyond the metropolis, by upsetting dominant taxonomies of urban spaces as well as dominant taxonomies of political actions.

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*Crisis-scape* is a collective research project that traces the effects of the current crisis on Athens' public space. The rise of a state of emergency, of racism, of impoverishment, along with other unprecedented forms of physical and political violence are traced through the city's everyday: Athens' metro, its airports old and new, its highways, its squares and streets become points of departure for the analysis of a new condition of existence that the crisis gives birth to.

The project combines urban theory, anthropology, geography as well as visual research methods and digital design to read the enormous, oftentimes devastating social and political change playing out before our eyes.

*This volume—Crisis-scapes: Athens and Beyond—acts as an accompaniment to the conference of the same title that took place at the Athens Polytechnic in early May 2014.*